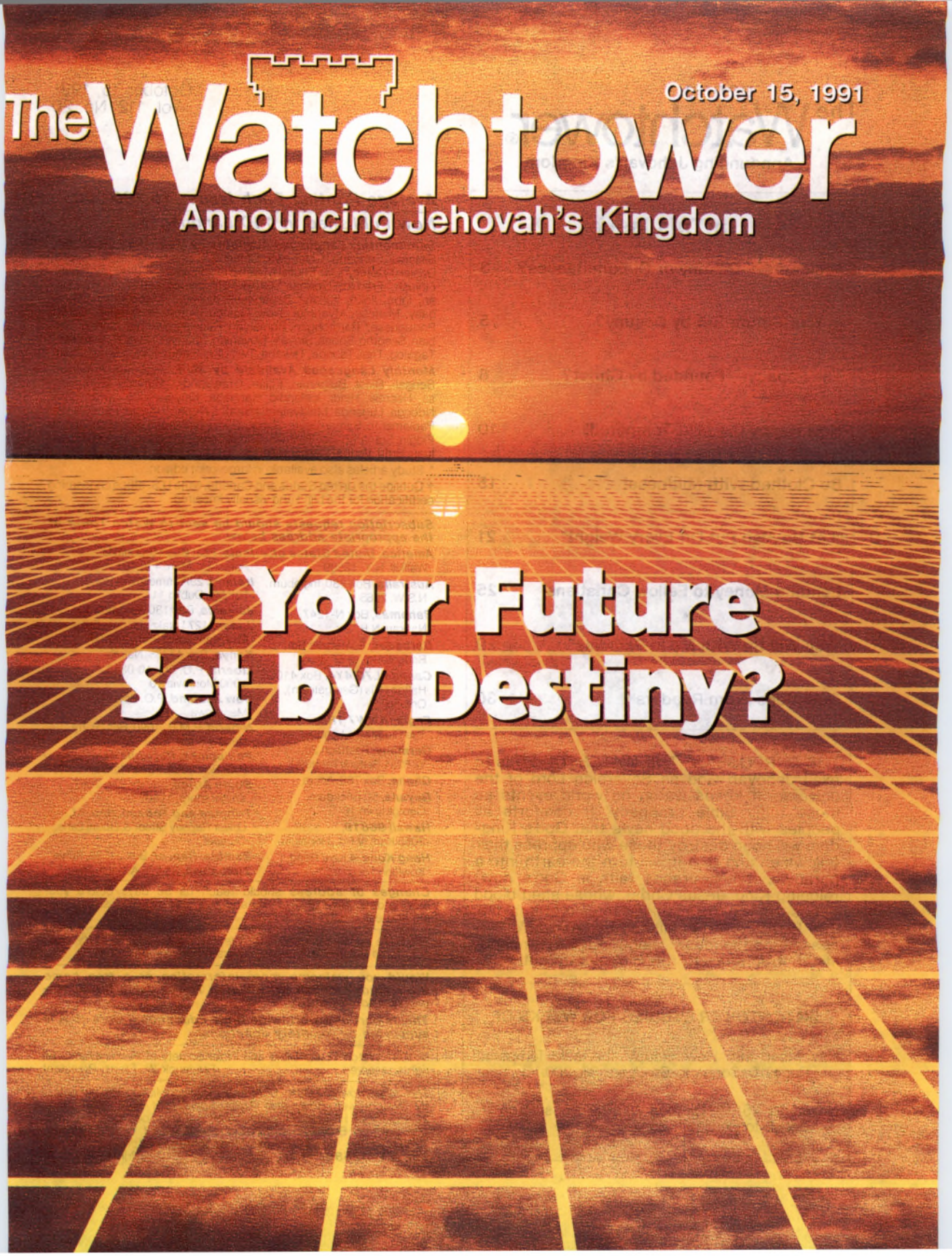
October 15, 1991

The Watchtower

Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom



Is Your Future Set by Destiny?

The Watchtower®
Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom

October 15, 1991
Vol. 112, No. 20

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

WATCHTOWER STUDIES FOR WEEKS OF

November 18: How Happy the Mild-Tempered! Page 10. Songs to Be Used: 36, 200.

November 25: Be Clothed With Mildness! Page 15. Songs to Be Used: 35, 177.

Average Printing Each Issue: 15,290,000

Now Published in 110 Languages.

Semimonthly Languages Available by Mail: Afrikaans, Arabic, Bislama, Cebuano, Chichewa, Chinese, Cibemba, Croatian, Czech, Danish,* Dutch,* Efik, English* (also Braille and cassettes†), Estonian, Finnish,* French,* German,* Greek,* Hiligaynon, Hiri Motu, Hungarian, Igbo, Iloko, Italian,* Japanese,* Korean,* Macedonian, Malagasy, Maltese, Myanmar, New Guinea Pidgin, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese,* Rarotongan, Romanian, Russian, Samoan, Sepedi, Serbian, Sesotho, Shona, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish,* Swahili, Swedish,* Tagalog, Thai, Tsonga, Tswana, Twi, Ukrainian, Xhosa, Yoruba, Zulu

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* Study articles also available in large-print edition.

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The Watchtower (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201. Second-class postage paid at Brooklyn, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. ***Postmaster:*** Send address changes to Watchtower, ***Wallkill, N.Y. 12589.*** Printed in U.S.A.

ACCIDENTS
destiny or circumstances?

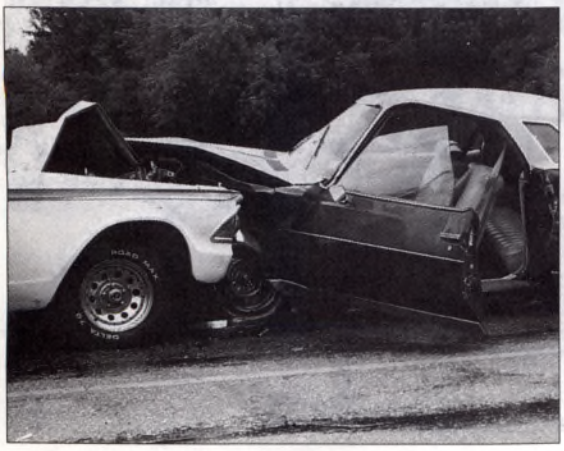
AS Cristina, an attractive young model, crossed busy Nove de Julho Avenue in São Paulo, Brazil, she did not see the approaching bus. The driver desperately attempted to stop his vehicle, but it was too late. Cristina was run over and killed.

This tragic accident earned a front-page report in the Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo.* (July 29, 1990) Yet it was merely one of 50,000 traffic fatalities that occur each year in Brazil. And while thousands more are disabled by such accidents, others survive unscathed. Why, then, did this young girl not survive? Was she destined to die that day?

> "The bitterest tragic element in life is the belief in a brute Fate or Destiny."
>
> *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Countless people would argue that this is the case. They believe in fate, that major events, such as one's time of death, are predetermined. This belief has given birth to such expressions as "No one can fight against destiny," "His time has come," or "Whatever will be will be." Is there any truth to popular sayings like these? Are we merely pawns of fate?

Fatalism, or the concept that all events are determined in advance, prevailed among the ancient Greeks and Romans. Even today the idea remains strong in many religions. Islam, for example, holds to the words of the Koran: "No soul can ever die except by Allah's leave and at a term appointed." Belief in fate is also common in Christendom and has been nurtured by the doctrine of predestination, taught by John Calvin. It is, therefore, common for clerics to tell grieving relatives that a certain accident was "the will of God."



The view that accidents are the product of fate, however, runs contrary to common sense, experience, and logic. For one thing, automobile accidents can hardly be the result of divine intervention, since a thorough investigation will usually reveal a perfectly logical cause. Furthermore, statistics clearly show that taking reasonable precautions—such as wearing a seat belt—greatly diminishes the likelihood of a fatal accident. Could any safety precautions really thwart the predetermined will of God?

Belief in fate adversely affects the believer, though. Does it not encourage foolhardy actions, such as ignoring speed limits and traffic signs or driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs? More serious, belief in fatalism induces some people to blame God when an accident touches them. Feeling angry and helpless, and convinced that God is unconcerned, they may even lose faith. Well did the poet Emerson say: "The bitterest tragic element in life is the belief in a brute Fate or Destiny."

But what does the Bible say about mishaps and accidents? Does it really teach that these are the workings of fate? In addition, what does it say about our prospects for salvation? Do we have any choice at all in the matter?

Is your future set by DESTINY?

IF YOU were to escape a fatal accident, would you feel that you had been favored by destiny? Or would you instead be grateful that you simply happened to be in the right place at the right time?

> Apostate Israelites who adopted the pagan concept of fate were severely condemned by God

The wise man Solomon said: "I returned to see under the sun that the swift do not have the race, nor the mighty ones the battle, nor do the wise also have the food, nor do the understanding ones also have the riches, nor do even those having knowledge have the favor; because *time and unforeseen occurrence befall them all.*" (Ecclesiastes 9:11) How often the unexpected happens! A favored athlete is injured, and the underdog wins. A freak accident brings financial ruin to an honest businessman, allowing his shady competitor to become rich. But did Solomon attribute these anomalies to fate? Not at all. These are simply the effects of "time and unforeseen occurrence."

Jesus Christ made a similar observation. Referring to an event that was apparently common knowledge among his listeners, Jesus asked: "Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, thereby killing them, do you imagine that they were proved greater debtors than all other men inhabiting Jerusalem?" (Luke 13:4) Jesus did not blame these fatalities on some mysterious fate or on the will of God, nor did he believe that the victims were somehow more blameworthy than others. The tragic accident was just another example of time and unforeseen occurrence at work.

Nowhere does the Bible espouse the idea that God has predetermined our time of death. It is true that Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2 says: "For everything there is an appointed time, even a time for every affair under the heavens: a time for birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what was planted." Yet Solomon was simply discussing the continuing cycle of life and death that afflicts imperfect humanity. We are born, and when the time comes, when normal life expectancy is reached—usually after 70 or 80 years or so—we die. Still, the exact moment of death has no more been predetermined by God than the moment when a farmer decides "to plant" or "to uproot what was planted."

In fact, Solomon later shows that a person might die *prematurely,* saying: "Do not be wicked overmuch, nor become foolish. Why should you die when it is not your time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:17) What sense would this counsel make if one's time of

death were unchangeably predetermined? The Bible thus rejects the notion of fate. Apostate Israelites who adopted this pagan concept were severely condemned by God. Isaiah 65:11 says: "You men are those leaving Jehovah, those forgetting my holy mountain, those setting in order a table for the god of Good Luck and those filling up mixed wine for the god of Destiny."

How foolish it is, then, to attribute accidents and mishaps to fate or, worse yet, to God himself! "God is love," says the Bible, and to accuse him of being the author of human misery directly contradicts this fundamental truth.—1 John 4:8.

God's Purposes for the Future

What, though, about our prospects for salvation? Does the fact that no inevitable fate controls our lives mean that we must drift aimlessly? Not at all, for God has determined the future of mankind in general. The Bible speaks of the creation of "a new earth" in which "righteousness is to dwell."—2 Peter 3:13.

To accomplish this, God will directly intervene in human affairs. Unknowingly, you may have prayed for this to take place by reciting the prayer that says: "Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth." (Matthew 6:10) This Kingdom is a real government established in the heavens. By praying for it to come, you pray for that Kingdom to take over control of earth from present-day governments.—Daniel 2:44.

Securing Your Own Future

How these dramatic events will affect your future depends, not on fate or even on time and unforeseen occurrence, but on the course you choose to follow. Recall that tragedy of the tower of Siloam. Jesus used that sad event to teach a profound lesson. The victims of that tower collapse were unable to escape what befell them. By way of contrast, Jesus' listeners could avoid the destruction that resulted from divine displeasure. Jesus warned them: "Unless you repent, you will all be destroyed in the same way." (Luke 13:4, 5) Clearly, they could choose their own future.

The same opportunity is extended to us today—to work out our own salvation. (Philippians 2:12) God desires that "all sorts of men . . . come to an accurate knowledge of truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) And though each one of us is affected to some extent by inheritance and background, God has given us free will—the capacity to determine how we want to use our life. (Matthew 7:13, 14) We can do what is right or what is wrong. We can gain a favorable standing with Jehovah God and gain life, or we can turn against him and die.

Many choose to live independent of God. They devote their lives to the pursuit of material things, pleasure, or fame. But Jesus warned: "Keep your eyes open and guard against every sort of covetousness, because even when a person has an abundance his life does not result from the things he possesses." (Luke 12:15) On what, then, do our lives depend? At 1 John 2:15-17, the Bible explains: "Do not be loving either the world or the things in the world. . . . Everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life—does not originate with the Father, but originates with the world. Furthermore, the world is passing away and so is its desire, but he that does the will of God remains forever."

Choosing Life

How can you be sure that you are truly doing the will of God? Jesus declared: "This

means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3) Accurate knowledge from the Bible provides the basis for faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please him well, for he that approaches God must believe that he is and that he becomes the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him." (Hebrews 11:6) The knowledge that you need to acquire is readily available. Jehovah's Witnesses have helped millions to gain it through a regular study of the Bible.*

In order to please God, you will have to make some changes. There may be some bad habits that must be overcome or even immoral practices that must be ended. Do not give up, as if it were impossible for you to change. The idea that things cannot change is just another carryover from the false doctrine of fatalism. With Jehovah's help, it is possible for anyone to 'make his mind over' and to acquire "the new personality." (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24) Your efforts to please God will not go unnoticed. He stands ready to bless those doing his will.

Admittedly, learning the Bible will not solve all your problems. Genuine servants of God are subject to accidents and adverse circumstances, as are others. However, God *can give* us the wisdom to cope with adversity. (James 1:5) There is also the joy of knowing that one has a good relationship with God. "Happy is he that is trusting in Jehovah," says Proverbs 16:20.

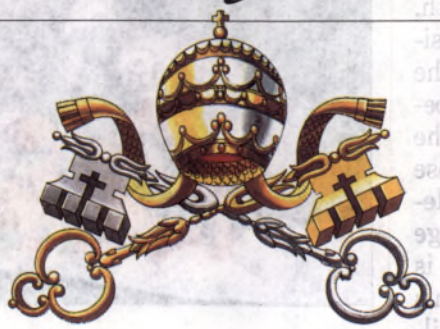
* Such a study can be arranged by writing to the publishers of this magazine.

In the restored Paradise under God's Kingdom, we will no longer feel threatened by time and unforeseen occurrence. Indeed, God will remove all things that presently mar human happiness. "He will wipe out every tear from [our] eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore," promises the Bible. (Revelation 21:4) Countless accident victims will experience a resurrection. —John 5:28, 29.

Will you inherit this glorious future? When the Israelites were about to go into the Promised Land, Moses told them: "I have put life and death before you, the blessing and the malediction; and you must choose life in order that you may keep alive, you and your offspring, by loving Jehovah your God, by listening to his voice and by sticking to him; for he is your life and the length of your days."—Deuteronomy 30: 19, 20.

No, we are not helpless pawns in the hands of a merciless fate. Your future happiness, indeed your eternal future, is in your hands. We urge you to choose life.

THE PAPACY
Founded by Christ?



"BETWEEN Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, and our present pope, John Paul II, there stretches a long line of supreme pontiffs—more than 260, in fact." So says Catholic friar Anthony Foy in *The Southern Cross,* a Catholic weekly for southern Africa. He continues: "It is to this unbroken line of popes that we can confidently point, when we are asked to prove that the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ."

Can it be confidently said that this long line of popes began with the apostle Peter? According to Catholic theology, four popes, Linus, Anacletus, Clement I, and Evaristus, are said to have succeeded Peter up to the year 100 C.E. The Bible does mention a Christian named Linus who lived in Rome. (2 Timothy 4:21) However, there is nothing to suggest that Linus, or anyone else, was a papal successor to Peter. The apostle John, who penned five books of the Bible in the last decade of the first century, made no reference to any of the above so-called successors of Peter. Indeed, if there was a successor to Peter, would not the logical choice have been John himself?

As to the claim that Peter was the first bishop of Rome, there is no proof that he even visited that city. In fact, Peter himself states that he wrote his first letter from Babylon. (1 Peter 5:13) The Catholic argument that Peter used "Babylon" as a cryptic reference to Rome is groundless. The real Babylon existed in Peter's day. Furthermore, Babylon had a sizable Jewish community. Since Jesus assigned Peter to concentrate his preaching on the circumcised Jews, it is altogether reasonable to believe that Peter visited Babylon for this purpose. —Galatians 2:9.

Note, too, that Peter never referred to himself as anything more than one of Christ's apostles. (2 Peter 1:1) Nowhere in the Bible is he addressed as "Holy Father," "Supreme Pontiff," or "Pope" (Latin, *papa,* an affectionate term for "Father"). Instead, he humbly adhered to Jesus' words at Matthew 23:9, 10: "Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for one is your Father, the heavenly One. Neither be called 'leaders,' for your Leader is one, the Christ." Peter did not accept veneration. When Roman centurion Cornelius "fell down at his feet and did obeisance to him

. . . , Peter lifted him up, saying: 'Rise; I myself am also a man.' "
—Acts 10:25, 26.

As to the 260 alleged popes, priest Foy admits: "A number have been unworthy of their high office." In an attempt to justify this, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states: "What mattered for purposes of government was the office, and not the personal character of the individual pope. He may personally have been a saint, a mediocrity, or even a scoundrel." But do you believe that Christ would use such men to represent him?

At any rate, the assertion that the papacy was founded by

Jesus is simply not supported in the Bible. According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion,* even modern Catholic scholars concede that "there is no direct biblical proof that Jesus established the papacy as a permanent office within the church."

HOW HAPPY THE MILD-TEMPERED!

"Happy are the mild-tempered ones, since they will inherit the earth."
—MATTHEW 5:5.

IN HIS Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ said: "Happy are the mild-tempered ones, since they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) This mildness of temper, or meekness, is not a veneer of hypocritical gentleness, nor is it simply a natural personality trait. Rather, it is genuine inward mildness and peaceableness exercised primarily in response to Jehovah God's will and guidance. Truly mild-tempered people have a keen sense of dependence on God that is reflected in mild conduct toward fellow humans.—Romans 12:17-19; Titus 3:1, 2.

1. What is the mildness of temper that Jesus spoke of in his Sermon on the Mount?

2 Jesus pronounced the mild-tempered happy because they will inherit the earth. As the perfectly mild-tempered Son of God, Jesus is the Chief Inheritor of the earth. (Psalm 2:8; Matthew 11:29; Hebrews 1:1, 2; 2:5-9) But as the Messianic "son of man," he was to have associate rulers in his heavenly Kingdom. (Daniel 7:13, 14, 22, 27) As Christ's "joint heirs," these anointed mild-tempered ones will share in his inheritance of the earth. (Romans 8:17) Other mild-tempered, sheeplike people will enjoy eternal life in Paradise in the Kingdom's earthly realm. (Matthew 25:33, 34, 46; Luke

2. Why did Jesus pronounce the mild-tempered happy?

23:43) That prospect makes them happy indeed.

[3] The mild-tempered Chief Inheritor receives the earth from his Father, Jehovah, the prime example of mildness of temper. How often the Scriptures say that God is "slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness"! (Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15) He has great power but displays such mildness that his worshipers can approach him without dread. (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22) God's Son, who was "mild-tempered and lowly in heart," taught his disciples to be mild. (Matthew 11:29; Luke 6:27-29) In turn, these mild-tempered slaves of God and his Son copied and wrote about "the mildness and kindness of the Christ."—2 Corinthians 10:1; Romans 1:1; James 1:1, 2; 2 Peter 1:1.

[4] Today, both anointed Christians and their earthly companions need to be mild-tempered. Having put off any badness, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and backbiting, they have been helped by God's holy spirit to become new in 'the force actuating their mind.' (Ephesians 4:22-24; 1 Peter 2:1, 2) They are urged to clothe themselves with "the tender affections of compassion, kindness, lowliness of mind, mildness, and long-suffering." (Colossians 3:12) But exactly what does mildness encompass? Why is it beneficial to be mild-tempered? And how can this quality contribute to our happiness?

A Closer Look at Mildness

[5] A mild-tempered individual is gentle in disposition and behavior. In certain versions of the Bible, it is the adjective *pra·ys'* that is translated "meek," "mild," "mild-tempered," and "gentle." In classical Greek, the adjective *pra·ys'* can apply to a gentle breeze or voice. It can also denote someone who is gracious. Scholar W. E. Vine says: "The exercises of [the noun *pra·y'tes*] are first and chiefly towards God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; it is closely linked with the word *tapeinophrosunē* [humility]."

[6] Mildness is not weakness. "There is gentleness in *praus,*" wrote scholar William Barclay, "but behind the gentleness there is the strength of steel." It takes strength to be mild-tempered. For instance, strength is needed to be mild under provocation or when we are persecuted. God's mild-tempered Son, Jesus Christ, set a fine example in this regard. "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 [Jehovah God] who judges righteously." (1 Peter 2:23) Like mild-tempered Jesus, we can be confident that God will deal with our revilers and persecutors. (1 Corinthians 4:12, 13) We can be tranquil, as persecuted Stephen was, realizing that if we are faithful, Jehovah will sustain us and let nothing do us permanent harm.—Psalm 145:14; Acts 6:15; Philippians 4:6, 7, 13.

[7] Jesus was mild-tempered, yet he displayed strength in standing firm for what is right. (Matthew 21:5; 23:13-39) Anyone having "the mind of Christ" will be like him in this respect. (1 Corinthians 2:16) If a person is not mild, he is not Christlike.

3. God and Christ set what example as to mildness?
4. (a) According to Colossians 3:12, what has been done by those who are truly mild-tempered? (b) What questions merit our consideration?
5. How may mildness be defined?
6. Why can it be said that mildness is not weakness?
7. What does Proverbs 25:28 indicate about an individual lacking mildness?

Rather, he fits these words: "As a city broken through, without a wall, is the man that has no restraint for his spirit." (Proverbs 25:28) Such an individual lacking mildness is vulnerable to the invasion of wrong thoughts that could cause him to act in improper ways. While a mild-tempered Christian is not a weakling, still he knows that "an answer, when mild, turns away rage, but a word causing pain makes anger to come up."—Proverbs 15:1.

[8] It is not easy to be mild-tempered, for we have inherited imperfection and sin. (Romans 5:12) If we are Jehovah's servants, we also have a fight against wicked spirit forces that may test our mildness by persecution. (Ephesians 6:12) And most of us work among those who have the harsh spirit of the world that is under the Devil's control. (1 John 5:19) So how can we develop mildness?

How to Develop Mildness

[9] *Bible-based conviction that we are required to display mildness will help us to develop this quality.* Day by day we must work to cultivate mildness. Otherwise, we will be like people who view mildness as weakness and think that success results from being arrogant, tough, even cruel. However, God's Word condemns pride, and a wise proverb says: "A man of loving-kindness is dealing rewardingly with his own soul, but the cruel person is bringing ostracism upon his own organism." (Proverbs 11:17; 16:18) People stay away from a harsh, unkind person, even if they do so mainly to avoid being hurt by his cruelty and lack of mildness.

[10] *To be mild-tempered, we must submit to the influence of God's holy spirit, or active force.* As Jehovah made it possible for the earth to produce crops, so he enables his servants to bring forth the fruits of his spirit, including mildness. Paul wrote: "The fruitage of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22, 23) Yes, mildness is one of the fruits of God's spirit displayed by those who please him. (Psalm 51:9, 10) And what changes mildness produces! To illustrate: There was a ruffian named Tony who fought, robbed people, smuggled narcotics, led a motorcycle gang, and spent time in prison. Yet, by acquiring knowledge of the Bible and with the help of God's spirit, he changed into a mild-mannered servant of Jehovah. Tony's story is typical. What, then, can a person do if a lack of mildness has been a dominant feature of his personality?

[11] *Heartfelt prayer for God's spirit and for its fruit of mildness will help us to cultivate this quality.* We may need to "keep on asking," as Jesus said, and Jehovah God will grant our request. After showing that human fathers give their children good things, Jesus said: "If you, although being [sinful and thus comparatively] wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will the Father in heaven give holy spirit to those asking him!" (Luke 11:9-13) Prayer can help to make mildness a permanent feature of our temperament—a quality contributing to our happiness and that of our associates.

[12] *Keeping in mind that humans are imperfect can help us to be mild-tempered.* (Psalm 51:5) We cannot think or act per-

8. Why is it not easy to be mild-tempered?
9. What viewpoint will help us to develop mildness?
10. If we are to be mild-tempered, to what must we submit?
11. In developing mildness, what role does prayer play?
12. Why can keeping in mind that humans are imperfect help us to be mild-tempered?

fectly, any more than other people can, so we should surely have empathy and treat them as we would like to be treated. (Matthew 7:12) Being aware that all of us make mistakes should cause us to be forgiving and mild-tempered in dealing with others. (Matthew 6:12-15; 18:21, 22) After all, are we not thankful that God displays love and mildness toward us?—Psalm 103:10-14.

[13] *Acknowledging that God has made humans free moral agents can also help us to cultivate mildness.* This does not permit anyone to ignore Jehovah's laws with impunity, but it does allow for variety in tastes, likes, and dislikes among his people. So let us acknowledge that no one is obligated to fit into the mold we may consider best. This spirit will help us to be mild-tempered.

[14] *Determination not to abandon mildness will help us to keep on cultivating this quality.* Submitting to the influence of Jehovah's spirit brought about a transformation in our thinking. (Romans 12:2) A mild, Christlike spirit now helps to restrain us from engaging in "deeds of loose conduct, lusts, excesses with wine, revelries, drinking matches, and illegal idolatries." We must never abandon mildness for financial, social, or other reasons or because people make abusive remarks about our godliness. (1 Peter 4:3-5) We must let nothing make us engage in "the works of the flesh," so that we lose our mildness and fail to inherit God's Kingdom or enjoy its blessings. (Galatians 5:19-21) Let us always cherish the privilege of being God's mild-tempered ones, whether anointed to heavenly life or having an earthly hope. To that end, let us consider some benefits of mildness.

13. How can we be helped to cultivate mildness if we acknowledge that God has made humans free moral agents?
14. As to mildness, what should be our determination?

Benefits of Mildness

[15] *A mild person has calmness of heart, mind, and body.* This is so because he does not engage in strife, get upset over others' actions, or torment himself with unrelenting anxiety. Mildness helps him keep his emotions in check, and this is beneficial mentally and physically. A proverb says: "A calm heart is the life of the fleshly organism." (Proverbs 14:30) Lack of mildness may lead to anger that can raise blood pressure or cause digestive troubles, asthma, eye afflictions, and other problems. A mild-tempered Christian enjoys various benefits, including "the peace of God" that guards his heart and mental powers. (Philippians 4:6, 7) How wise it is to be mild-tempered!

[16] *The quality of mildness improves our relationship with others.* Perhaps we once had the habit of pressing matters until we got our way. People may have become angry with us because we lacked humility and mildness. Under such circumstances, it should not have surprised us if we became embroiled in one controversy after another. However, a proverb says: "Where there is no wood the fire goes out, and where there is no slanderer contention grows still. As charcoal for the embers and wood for the fire, so is a contentious man for causing a quarrel to glow." (Proverbs 26:20, 21) If we are mild-tempered, instead of 'adding wood to the fire' and provoking others, we will have a good relationship with them.

[17] *A mild-tempered person is likely to have good friends.* People enjoy associating with him because he has a positive attitude, and his words are refreshing and sweet as honey. (Proverbs 16:24) That was true of Jesus,

15. According to Proverbs 14:30, why is it wise to be mild?
16-18. What effect does mildness have on our relationship with others?

who could say: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls. For my yoke is kindly and my load is light." (Matthew 11:29, 30) Jesus was not harsh, and his yoke was not oppressive. Those coming to him were treated well and refreshed spiritually. The situation is similar when we associate with a mild-tempered Christian friend.

[18] *Mildness endears us to fellow believers.* Undoubtedly, most Christians in Corinth were drawn to Paul because he entreated them "by the mildness and kindness of the Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:1) The Thessalonians surely must have responded to the apostle, since he was a mild, gentle teacher. (1 Thessalonians 2:5-8) There is no question that the Ephesian elders had learned much from Paul and loved him dearly. (Acts 20:20, 21, 37, 38) Do you display mildness that endears you to others?

[19] *A mild temper helps Jehovah's people to be submissive and to keep their place in his organization.* (Philippians 2:5-8, 12-14; Hebrews 13:17) Mildness restrains us from seeking glory, which is based on pride and is offensive to God. (Proverbs 16:5) A mild person does not consider himself superior to fellow believers, and he does not try to excel at their expense. (Matthew 23:11, 12)

19. How does mildness help Jehovah's people to keep their place in his organization?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ Why are mild-tempered people happy?
- ☐ What does it mean to be mild-tempered?
- ☐ How can mildness be developed?
- ☐ What are some benefits of mildness?

Instead, he acknowledges his sinful state and his need for God's ransom provision.

Mildness Promotes Happiness

[20] All of God's servants should remember that mildness is a fruit of his spirit that promotes happiness. For instance, because Jehovah's people display such qualities as love and mildness, happy homes abound among them. When husband and wife deal with each other in a mild way, their children are reared in a calm environment, not in a family given to harsh words and actions. As a father gives his children counsel in mildness, this has a good effect on their young minds, and a mild spirit is likely to become part of their personality. (Ephesians 6:1-4) A mild temper helps husbands to keep on loving their wives. It assists wives to be in subjection to their husbands and moves children to obey their parents. Mildness also causes family members to have a forgiving spirit that contributes to happiness.—Colossians 3:13, 18-21.

[21] Mild-tempered families and individuals promote happiness in congregations with which they are associated. Therefore, Jehovah's people need to make earnest effort to be mild-tempered. Are you doing so? The apostle Paul entreated fellow anointed Christians to walk worthily of their heavenly calling, doing so "with complete lowliness of mind and mildness, with long-suffering, putting up with one another in love, earnestly endeavoring to observe the oneness of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3) Christians with an earthly hope must also display mildness and other godly qualities. This is the course that brings true happiness. Happy indeed are the mild-tempered!

20. What effect does mildness have on family life?

21. In essence, what counsel did the apostle Paul give at Ephesians 4:1-3?

BE CLOTHED WITH MILDNESS!

"As God's chosen ones, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with the tender affections of compassion, kindness, lowliness of mind, mildness, and long-suffering."—COLOSSIANS 3:12.

JEHOVAH gives his people the very best figurative clothing. In fact, all who desire his favor must be clothed in a garment having strong strands of mildness. This quality is comforting because it minimizes tension in stressful situations. It is protective too, for it wards off strife.

[2] The apostle Paul urged fellow anointed Christians: "As God's chosen ones, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with the tender affections of compassion, kindness, lowliness of mind, mildness, and long-suffering." (Colossians 3:12) The tense of the Greek word rendered "clothe yourselves" denotes action to be taken with a sense of urgency. Anointed ones, who were chosen, holy, and loved by God, were not to delay in clothing themselves with such qualities as mildness.

[3] Paul added: "Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely if anyone has a cause for complaint

1-3. At Colossians 3:12-14, what did the apostle Paul say about mildness and other godly qualities?

against another. Even as Jehovah freely forgave you, so do you also. But, besides all these things, clothe yourselves with love, for it is a perfect bond of union." (Colossians 3:13, 14) Love, mildness, and other godly qualities make it possible for Jehovah's Witnesses to "dwell together in unity."—Psalm 133:1-3.

Mild-Tempered Shepherds Needed

[4] True Christians strive to 'deaden their body members as respects fornication, uncleanness, sexual appetite, hurtful desire, and covetousness,' and they work at removing any old garment having a fabric of wrath, anger, badness, abusive speech, and obscene talk. (Colossians 3:5-11) They strip off "the old personality" (literally, "the old man") and put on "the new personality" (or, "the new man"), a suitable garb. (Ephesians 4:22-24, *Kingdom Interlinear*) Their new garment, woven of compassion, kindness, lowliness of mind, mildness, and long-suffering, helps them to resolve problems and to live godly lives.—Matthew 5:9; 18: 33; Luke 6:36; Philippians 4:2, 3.

[5] Men considered successful in this world *are often* hard, even cruel. (Proverbs 29:22) How refreshingly different it is among Jehovah's people! The Christian congregation does not function as some men operate a business—in an efficient but harsh manner that may make people unhappy. Rather, it is a joy to be part of the congregation. One reason is that mildness of temper is a feature of the wisdom displayed by Christians in general and especially by men qualified to teach fellow believers. Yes, joy results from instruction and counsel given by appointed elders who teach "with a mildness that belongs to wisdom."—James 3:13.

4. True Christians wear a figurative garment woven of what qualities?
5. What is there about the functioning of the Christian congregation that makes it such a joy to be part of it?

[6] The spirit, or dominant attitude, of God's people requires that men entrusted with oversight in the congregation be mild-tempered, reasonable, and understanding. (1 Timothy 3:1-3) Jehovah's servants are like gentle sheep, not obstinate goats, stubborn mules, or ravenous wolves. (Psalm 32:9; Luke 10:3) Being sheeplike, they need to be treated with mildness and tenderness. (Acts 20:28, 29) Yes, God expects elders to be mild, kind, loving, and patient toward his sheep.—Ezekiel 34:17-24.

[7] As "a slave of the Lord," an elder "needs to be gentle toward all, qualified to teach, keeping himself restrained under evil, instructing with mildness those not favorably disposed; as perhaps God may give them repentance leading to an accurate knowledge of truth." (2 Timothy 2:24, 25) Christian shepherds should show tender consideration when trying to help the spiritually sick, for the sheep belong to God. Elders must not treat them as a hireling would but need to be mild-tempered, like the Fine Shepherd, Jesus Christ.—John 10:11-13.

[8] An elder may at times find it difficult to maintain a mild spirit. "Moses was by far the meekest of all the men who were upon the surface of the ground." (Numbers 12:3) Yet, when the Israelites faced a water shortage at Kadesh, they quarreled with Moses and blamed him for leading them from Egypt into a barren wilderness. Despite all that Moses had meekly endured, he spoke rashly, harshly. He and Aaron stood before the people and directed attention to themselves, Moses saying: "Hear, now, you rebels! Is it from this crag that we shall bring out water for you?" Moses then struck the crag with his rod twice, and God made

6. Why must Christian elders be mild-tempered?
7. How should elders instruct others or help the spiritually sick?
8. What happened to mild-tempered Moses, and why?

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Jehovah's people are sheeplike and need to be treated with mildness

"much water" come out for the people and their animals. Jehovah was displeased because Moses and Aaron had not sanctified Him, so Moses was not privileged to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.—Numbers 20:1-13; Deuteronomy 32:50-52; Psalm 106:32, 33.

[9] A Christian elder's mildness may also be tested in various ways. For instance, Paul warned Timothy that there could arise someone "puffed up with pride" and "mentally diseased over questionings and debates *about* words." Paul added: "From these things spring envy, strife, abusive speeches, wicked suspicions, violent disputes about trifles on the part of men corrupted in mind and despoiled of the truth." The overseer Timothy was not to act harshly but was to "flee from these things," and he was to "pursue righteousness, godly devotion, faith, love, endurance, mildness of temper." —1 Timothy 6:4, 5, 11.

9. How may an elder's mildness be tested?

[10] Though elders need to be mild, they must be firm for what is right. Titus was that way, reminding those associated with congregations in Crete to "speak injuriously of no one, not to be belligerent, to be reasonable, exhibiting all mildness toward all men." (Titus 3:1, 2) Showing why Christians should be mild-tempered toward all, Titus was to point out how kind and loving Jehovah had been. God had not saved believers because of any righteous deeds they had performed but according to his mercy through Jesus Christ. Jehovah's mildness and patience mean salvation for us too. Like Titus, therefore, present-day elders should remind congregations to be in subjection to

10. Of what was Titus to remind the congregations?

God, imitating Him by treating others in a mild way.—Titus 3:3-7; 2 Peter 3:9, 15.

Mildness Guides the Wise Counselor

[11] What if a figurative sheep has erred? Paul said: "Brothers, even though a man takes some false step before he is aware of it, you who have spiritual qualifications try to readjust such a man in a spirit of mildness, as you each keep an eye on yourself, for fear you also may be tempted. Go on carrying the burdens of one another, and thus fulfill the law of the Christ." (Galatians 6:1, 2) Counsel is more effective if it is given in a spirit of mildness. Even if elders are trying to counsel an angry person, they should display self-control, realizing that "a mild tongue itself can break a bone." (Proverbs 25:15) Someone as hard as a bone may be softened by a mild statement, and his hardness may break down.

[12] Jehovah is a mild-tempered Instructor, and his mild way of teaching is effective in the congregation. This is especially so when elders find it necessary to counsel those requiring spiritual help. The disciple James wrote: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show out of his fine conduct his works with a mildness that belongs to wisdom." Mildness springs from respect and gratitude for "wisdom from above," coupled with modest recognition of one's own limitations. A mild and humble spirit protects the counselor from making damaging remarks and errors and makes his counsel easier to accept.—James 3: 13, 17.

[13] "A mildness that belongs to wisdom" precludes a counselor's being thoughtlessly blunt or harsh. Yet, concern over friendship or having someone's approval must not move an elder to say things designed to please rather than mildly to present straightforward counsel based on God's Word. (Proverbs 24:24-26; 28:23) The counsel Amnon received from his cousin satisfied his desire, but it cost him his life. (2 Samuel 13:1-19, 28, 29) Present-day elders must, therefore, not water down Bible principles to ease someone's conscience, for doing so could imperil his life. Like Paul, elders must not hold back from telling others "all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:26, 27; 2 Timothy 4:1-4) A mature Christian counselor shows godly fear and gives righteous counsel with a mildness belonging to wisdom.

[14] Mildness coupled with heavenly wisdom will prevent an elder from making harsh demands. He should also realize that it is unwise and inappropriate for him to make a decision that another person should make for himself. An elder would be responsible for the results if he made decisions for others, and he would share blame for any bad outcome. An elder can call attention to what the Bible says, but if there is no Scriptural law on a matter, an individual's own judgment and conscience must determine what he will or will not do. As Paul said: "Each one will carry his own load." (Galatians 6:5; Romans 14:12) However, an inquirer may be helped toward making a right decision by an elder's asking questions that assist the person to reason on the scriptures related to optional courses that may be open to him.

[15] If an elder does not know the answer to a question, he should not reply just to save

11. According to Galatians 6:1, 2, how should counsel be given?
12. How does a mild spirit help a counselor?
13. How does "a mildness that belongs to wisdom" affect the way counsel is given?
14. Why should an elder be careful not to make decisions that others should make themselves?
15. What should be done if an elder does not know the answer to a question?

Mildness enables Jehovah's people to witness to people of various dispositions

face. Mildness that belongs to wisdom would keep him from guessing and perhaps giving a wrong answer that later could cause distress. There is "a time to keep quiet and a time to speak." (Ecclesiastes 3:7; compare Proverbs 21:23.) An elder should "speak" only when he knows the answer to a question or has done enough research to give an accurate reply. It is wise to leave speculative questions unanswered. —Proverbs 12:8; 17:27; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:14.

Value of a Multitude of Counselors

[16] Prayer and study will help elders to answer questions and handle difficult problems, but it should be remembered that "in the multitude of counselors there is accomplishment." (Proverbs 15:22) Consulting with other elders results in a valuable pooling of wisdom. (Proverbs 13:20) Not all elders have equal experience or Bible knowledge. Hence, mildness that belongs to wisdom should move a less-experienced elder to consult with elders having greater knowledge and more experience, especially when a serious matter needs to be handled.

[17] When elders are chosen to handle a serious matter, they still may confidentially seek help. To assist him in judging the Israelites, Moses selected "capable men, fearing God, trustworthy men, hating unjust profit." Though they were elders, they did not have as much knowledge and experience as Moses did. Hence, "a hard case they would bring to Moses, but every small case they themselves would handle as judges." (Exodus 18:13-27) If necessary, then, elders handling a hard case today can properly seek the help of experienced overseers, though they make the final decision themselves.

[18] The Jewish Mishnah says that in Israel those making up village courts varied in

16, 17. Why is it appropriate for elders to consult with one another?

18. In handling judicial matters, what are the decisive factors ensuring proper decisions?

number according to the gravity of the case. There is true value in the multitude of counselors, though numbers alone do not guarantee rightness, for a majority can be wrong. (Exodus 23:2) The decisive factors ensuring that proper decisions will be made are the Scriptures and God's spirit. Wisdom and mildness will move Christians to submit to these.

Witnessing With Mildness

[19] Mildness also helps Jehovah's servants to witness to people of various dispositions. (1 Corinthians 9:22, 23) Because Jesus taught with mildness, humble ones did not fear him, as they did the harsh religious leaders. (Matthew 9:36) Of course, his mild ways attracted "sheep," not wicked "goats." (Matthew 25:31-46; John 3:16-21) Though Jesus used strong terms in dealing with goatlike hypocrites, Jehovah's Witnesses must be mild when declaring God's judgment messages today because they do not have the same insight and authority that Jesus had. (Matthew 23:13-36) As they hear the message of the Kingdom preached with mildness, 'those rightly disposed for everlasting life become believers,' as did sheeplike ones who heard Jesus.—Acts 13:48.

[20] Good results are attained by witnessing and instructing others with mildness and by appealing to them on the basis of logic, Bible principles, and truth. "Sanctify the Christ as Lord in your hearts," wrote Peter, "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 Peter 3:15) A student who is being taught in a mild way can concentrate on the material instead of being distracted or possibly even stumbled by a harsh, argumentative manner. Like Paul, ministers instructing with mildness can say: "In no way are we giving any cause for stumbling, that our ministry might not be found fault with." (2 Corinthians 6:3) Even opposers sometimes respond favorably to those instructing with mildness.

19. How does mildness help Jehovah's people to witness to others?
20. How does a Bible student benefit when he is taught with mildness?

Mildness Required of All

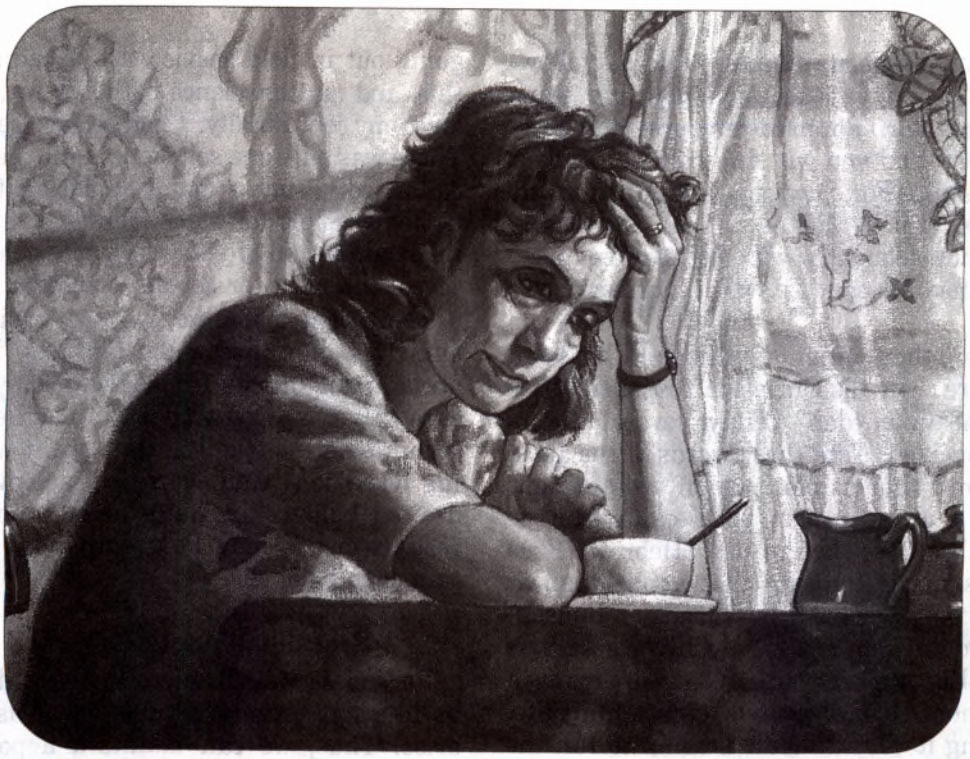
[21] Christian mildness must not be put on just to impress those outside Jehovah's organization. This quality is also vital in relationships among God's people. (Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Peter 4:8) Congregations are built up spiritually when mild-tempered elders and ministerial servants work together harmoniously. Displaying mildness and other godly qualities is important for every one of Jehovah's people because there is "one law" for all.—Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22.

[22] Mildness contributes to the peace and happiness of God's people. It should, therefore, be part of the fabric of qualities making up the garment worn by all Christians at home, in the congregation, and elsewhere. Yes, all servants of Jehovah need to be clothed with mildness.

21, 22. How does mildness benefit all of Jehovah's people?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ Why must Christian elders be mild-tempered?
- ☐ How does mildness guide the wise counselor?
- ☐ What is the value of a multitude of counselors?
- ☐ Why is it beneficial to witness with mildness?



"LET US ALSO PUT OFF EVERY WEIGHT"

"I am so sad and discouraged," lamented Mary. Referring to the load of Christian responsibilities, this Christian woman added: "I see friends experiencing burnout. I too feel the tiredness and the stress. Please help me to understand why."

DO YOU also feel that you are under stress, too tired to care adequately for your theocratic responsibilities? Does it sometimes seem that the Christian ministry is a heavy load, an unbearable burden? Many faithful Christians undergo periods of discouragement, for we are constantly surrounded by negative forces that can dampen our joy. Being a genuine Christian today is indeed a challenge. Thus, at times some may feel that the Christian ministry is a heavy load.

Seeking the Cause

The Scriptures make it clear that Jehovah has not placed unreasonable demands on us. The apostle John said that God's "commandments are not burdensome."

(1 John 5:3) Jesus similarly told his followers: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls. For my yoke is kindly and my load is light." (Matthew 11:29, 30) Clearly it is not Jehovah's will that we feel overburdened or loaded down in our service to him.

How, then, might a faithful Christian come to view his Christian responsibilities as a heavy burden? Likely, several factors are involved. Note these words of the apostle Paul: "Let us also put off every weight . . . , and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1) Paul's words indicate that a Christian at times may place needless loads on himself. This does not necessarily involve serious sins. But a Christian may make errors in judgment that severely complicate his life, making it very difficult for him to run the race that has been set before us.

A Balanced View of Material Things

Take, for example, the matter of secular work. In many lands, economic conditions may leave a Christian with little choice but to work long hours. Often, though, people take on work merely to get ahead or to accumulate luxuries. By reevaluating their actual needs, some Christians have found it wise to make adjustments in their employment situation. This was the case with Debbie and her husband, both of whom are Jehovah's Witnesses. She says: "Our financial situation had changed, and there was no longer a real need for me to continue working full-time. But it was hard to give it up." Soon she began to feel the pressure of having too much to do. She explains: "Saturday was my only free day to do housework. Often I just didn't feel like going out in field service. I felt bad about this, and my conscience bothered me, yet I loved my job! Finally, I had to face reality. There was only one solution. I quit the job." Admittedly, such a major adjustment may not be possible for some. However, a careful examination of your work schedule may reveal the need for certain changes.

There may be other ways of relieving ourselves of unnecessary burdens. What about reducing the frequency of our pleasure travel, sports activities, or other entertainment—including time spent watching television? And even after achieving a desired balance in these areas, constant readjustments may be required to maintain such balance.

Reasonableness Is Vital

Reasonableness in such matters will help us to adapt to new circumstances as they arise. Thus, we can maintain a positive view of our ministry.—Ephesians 5:15-17; Philippians 4:5.

Do you find yourself under pressure to keep pace with what others do in God's service? This too can add anxiety and frustration to your life. While the good example of others can certainly encourage you to do more, reasonableness will help you to set realistic goals in harmony with your own circumstances and abilities. The Scriptures tell us: "Let each one prove what his own work is, and then he will have cause for exultation in regard to himself alone, and not in comparison with the other person. For each one will carry his own load."—Galatians 6:4, 5.

Local customs and traditions may also add to our burdens. In Jesus' day the people were worn out from trying to comply with the many religious rules and traditions set forth by men. *Today, Jehovah's* people have been freed from false religious

traditions. (Compare John 8:32.) Still, a Christian could become unduly preoccupied with local customs. For example, sometimes events such as weddings are surrounded by quite elaborate customs. These customs may not be wrong, and they may even be quaint and interesting. However, Christians may not have the time or the financial means to observe all such things, and striving to do so could add other unnecessary burdens.

Consider what happened when Jesus visited a woman by the name of Martha. Rather than benefiting fully from his divine wisdom, "Martha . . . was distracted with attending to many duties." She was loaded down with many details. (Luke 10: 40) But Jesus kindly suggested that she might simplify her meal arrangements in order to benefit from his teaching. (Luke 10: 41, 42) This well illustrates that good judgment and reasonableness will help you in achieving proper balance in your Christian ministry.—James 3:17.

Good judgment is also required when selecting your companions. Proverbs 27:3 warns: "The heaviness of a stone and a load of sand—but the vexation by someone foolish is heavier than both of them." Invariably, your close associates will have a strong influence on your way of thinking. Keeping company with those who are quick to find fault and criticize others in the congregation may sow seeds of discouragement and negative thinking in you. (1 Corinthians 15:33) If you discern that this is a problem, some wise changes in the company you keep could lighten your load.

Be Modest in Walking With God

At Micah 6:8, we find this thought-provoking question: "What is Jehovah asking back from you but . . . to be modest in walking with your God?" Modesty is defined as an awareness of one's limitations. Those who do not recognize their limitations can overwhelm themselves with too many commitments. This has happened with mature Christians, even overseers, resulting in discouragement, frustration, and loss of joy. Kenneth, a Christian elder, admitted: "I saw myself going into a

depression, and I said, 'I am not going to let this happen to me.' So I cut down on some of my commitments and concentrated on what I could do."

Even the humble prophet Moses had difficulty in recognizing his own limitations. So Jethro, his father-in-law, had to bring Moses to his senses regarding the excessive amount of work he was trying to handle by himself. "What kind of business is this that you are doing for the people?" asked Jethro. "It is not good the way you are doing. You will surely wear out . . . because this business is too big a load for you. You are unable to do it by yourself. . . . But you yourself should select out of all the people capable men, . . . and it must occur that every big case they will bring to you, but every small case they themselves will handle as judges. So make it lighter for yourself, and they must carry the load with you." Moses immediately began to delegate some of his work to others, thus finding relief from what was becoming an unbearable load.—Exodus 18:13-26.

On another occasion Moses said to Jehovah: "I am not able, I by myself, to carry all this people, because they are too heavy for me." Again, the answer was to delegate. This may also be the solution to your predicament if you feel overwhelmed by too many commitments.—Numbers 11:14-17.

Jehovah Helps Us Carry the Load

Jesus said that his yoke was kindly and his load was light but not weightless. The yoke Jesus invited us to take upon ourselves is not a yoke of idleness. It is a yoke of complete dedication to God as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Therefore, a certain degree of weight or pressure comes with being a genuine Christian. (Matthew 16:24-26; 19:16-29; Luke 13:24) As world conditions worsen, pressures will increase. However, we have reason to be positive in our outlook because Jesus' invitation implies that others could get under his yoke *with him* and that he would assist them.* Thus, as long as we follow Christ's direction, our load will remain manageable because he will help us.

God cares for those who love him, and he guards the hearts and mental powers of all who prayerfully throw their burden upon him. (Psalm 55:22; Philippians 4:6, 7; 1 Peter 5:6, 7) "Blessed be Jehovah, who daily carries the load for us, the true God of our salvation," said the psalmist. (Psalm 68:19) Yes, be assured that God will daily carry the load for you too if you put off every weight and run with endurance the race that is set before you.

Wise elders are willing to delegate some tasks and to share the load

* The footnote rendering is: "Get under my yoke with me."

LENDING MONEY to Fellow Christians

PEDRO and Carlos were good friends.* They were fellow Christians, and their respective families often enjoyed warm association with one another. So when Carlos needed some money for his business, Pedro did not hesitate to offer to lend it to him. "Since we were good friends," explains Pedro, "I didn't mind."

Just two months later, however, Carlos' business failed, and repayments stopped. Pedro learned to his surprise that Carlos had used much of the money that he had borrowed to repay nonbusiness debts and to finance an extravagant life-style. The matter was not resolved to Pedro's satisfaction even after a year of visits and letters. Out of frustration, Pedro went to the authorities and had Carlos—his friend and Christian brother—thrown in jail.*

* The names have been changed.

* In some lands bankruptcy and defaulting on loans still commonly result in imprisonment.

Was this a proper course to take? We shall see.

Disagreements and misunderstandings over money loans are a frequent cause of ruined friendships among people around the world. At times it may even be a cause of discord among fellow Christians. In many lands bank loans are difficult to obtain, so it is common for people in need of financing to approach friends and relatives. The sad experience of Pedro and Carlos, however, illustrates that unless Bible principles are carefully followed by both borrower and lender, serious problems may arise. What, then, is the proper way of handling a request for a loan to a fellow Christian?

Counting the Costs of Borrowing

The Bible discourages unnecessary borrowing. "Do not you people be owing anybody a single thing, except to love one another," exhorts the apostle Paul. (Romans 13:8) So before taking on debt, count the cost of doing so. (Compare Luke 14:28.) Is there really a *need* to borrow money? Is it a matter of maintaining your livelihood so as to care for your family? (1 Timothy 5:8) Or is a measure of greed involved —perhaps a desire to live more luxuriously?—1 Timothy 6:9, 10.

Another significant factor is whether taking on debt will force you to work longer hours and perhaps neglect meetings and field service. Also, can you really afford to risk someone else's money? What if the business or undertaking fails? Remember, "the wicked one is borrowing and does not pay back."—Psalm 37:21.

'Speaking Truth' to Lenders

After considering such factors, you may still feel that a business loan is necessary. If it cannot be obtained through secular means, it is not necessarily wrong to approach a fellow Christian, for it is common to turn to friends in time of need, as Jesus noted at Luke 11:5. Yet one should take pains to "speak truth." (Ephesians 4:25) Honestly explain all the facts involved—including the risks, even the ones that may seem to be remote. And do not take offense if the prospective lender asks numerous pointed questions so that he can be sure that he has an accurate picture.*

Would it be speaking truth to borrow for one reason and then use the funds for another? Hardly. A Latin-American banker explains: "A bank would cancel your credit, and if you didn't pay up your debt immediately, they would get a court order to seize your belongings." If money is lent on the premise that it will increase the profitability of a business, to use it for another purpose in effect robs the lender of his assurance that the loan can be repaid. True, you may not fear legal reprisals when borrowing from a fellow Christian. Nonetheless, "the borrower is servant to the man doing the lending," and you have an obligation to be honest with him.—Proverbs 22:7.

Applying the Golden Rule in Business

Jesus said: "All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them." (Matthew 7:12) How important it is that this rule prevail when we are doing business with a fellow believer! For example, how would you react if a brother turned down your request for a loan? Would you feel that he betrayed your friendship? Or would you respect his right to decline your offer, realizing that he may well need his funds or may assess the risks as more serious than you do? He may honestly question your ability to handle the

* Some have borrowed small amounts from many lenders. Each lender, not getting full facts of the whole situation, may think the borrower will easily be able to repay.

funds effectively. In such a case, his refusal may very well be both practical and loving. —Proverbs 27:6.

If a friend does agree to lend you some money, details should be spelled out *in writing,* including how much has been borrowed, to what use the money will be put, what assets are security for the loan, and how and when it will be paid back. In some cases it is even wise to have the contract drawn up or looked over by a lawyer and filed with the authorities. At any rate, once an agreement has been signed, "let your word *Yes* mean Yes, your *No,* No." (Matthew 5:37) Do not presume upon your friend's goodwill by failing to take your obligation toward him as seriously as you would toward a bank.

Cautious Lenders

What if you are approached for a loan? Much will depend on the circumstances involved. For example, a Christian brother may, through no fault of his own, fall into financial ruin. If you have the means to do so, Christian love will move you to 'give him the necessities for his body.'—James 2: 15, 16.

How unloving it would be to take advantage of a brother's adversity by charging interest in such a case! Urged Jesus: "Continue to love your enemies and to do good and to lend without interest, not hoping for anything back."—Luke 6:35; compare Leviticus 25:35-38.

What, though, if you are simply being asked to finance a business venture or to secure a loan? Generally, such matters are best approached as financial investments. The Bible clearly urges caution, exhorting: "Do not get to be among those striking hands, among those who go security for loans."—Proverbs 22:26.

Such being the case, you must first determine if you really can afford the investment. Will it cause you financial ruin if the business fails or the borrower is unable to pay off the loan on time? If you can afford the loan and profits are to be made, you also have the right to share in them by charging reasonable interest for your loan. (Compare Luke 19:22, 23.) Proverbs 14:15 warns: "Anyone inexperienced puts faith in every word, but the shrewd one considers his steps." Some normally astute businessmen have thrown caution to the wind when doing business with fellow Christians. The lure of high interest payments has drawn some into reckless investments in which they have lost both their money and their friendships with fellow Christians.

Interestingly, bankers frequently consider three factors in assessing how risky a loan might be: (1) the character of the person requesting the loan, (2) his ability to repay, and (3) the conditions prevailing in his line of business. Would it not show "practical wisdom" to evaluate matters similarly when considering lending your hard-earned money to someone?—Proverbs 3:21.

For example, what is the reputation of the brother requesting the money? Is he known to be trustworthy and reliable or reckless and unstable? (Compare 1 Timothy 3:7.) If he wants to expand his business, has he successfully managed it to this point? (Luke 16:10) If not, practical assistance in managing his money might be more helpful in the long run than lending him money that may be mishandled.

Another factor would be the brother's ability to repay. What is his income? What debts does he have? It is only reasonable that he be frank with you. Nevertheless, Christian love must still prevail. You might, for example, want to secure the loan with the brother's salable assets. The Mosaic Law condemned seizing either a man's

means of livelihood or his basic possessions in order to secure a loan. (Deuteronomy 24: 6, 10-12) Thus, a South American brother who is a businessman says he will lend only up to half the amount of a brother's salable assets. "And I don't consider the tools of his trade or his house a salable asset," he explains. "I certainly would not want to turn my brother out on the street and seize his house in order to get my money back."

Finally, you should realistically consider the general business conditions where you live. We are living in "the last days," during which men are "lovers of money, . . . betrayers." (2 Timothy 3:1-4) While your friend and brother may be honest, his partners, employees, and clients may not be. As a Christian, he cannot resort to bribery and lying—tactics his competitors may use to their advantage. Also to be considered are the ravages of "time and unforeseen occurrence." (Ecclesiastes 9:11) The value of merchandise can suddenly drop. Runaway inflation can ruin a business or wipe out the value of your loan. Thievery, accidents, vandalism, and injuries are also unpleasant realities of business. You should consider all these aspects in making your decision.

Failure

At times, in spite of all precautions, a Christian is simply unable to repay his loan. The Golden Rule should move him to communicate regularly with his creditor. Perhaps only small payments are possible for a time. Nevertheless, a Christian should not feel that token payments excuse him from making real sacrifices to fulfill his obligations. (Psalm 15:4) A creditor who is a Christian is also obliged to show love. If he feels he has been dealt with fraudulently, he may apply the counsel at Matthew 18: 15-17.

Involving the secular authorities, as did Pedro in the case mentioned at the outset, would rarely be advisable. Says the apostle Paul: "Does anyone of you that has a case against the other dare to go to court before unrighteous men, and not before the holy ones? . . . Is it true that there is not one wise man among you that will be able to judge between his brothers, but brother goes to court with brother, and that before unbelievers? Really, then, it means altogether a defeat for you that you are having lawsuits with one another. Why do you not rather let yourselves be wronged? Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded?"—1 Corinthians 6:1-7.

There may be some situations—such as involving unbelieving partners, worldly suppliers, or insurance matters—that seem to require settlement in a secular court or by a governmental agency. But in most cases, a Christian would rather suffer some financial loss than subject the congregation to the shame that prosecuting a brother over an unpayable loan would bring.

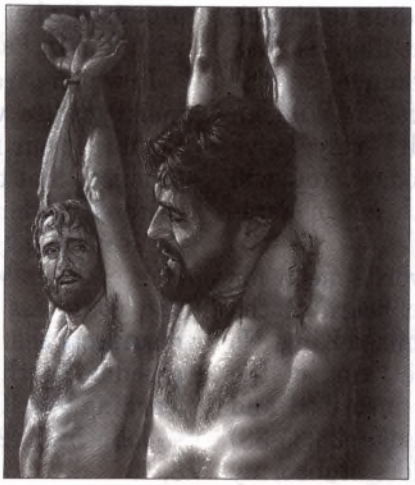
In most cases such dire consequences can be avoided. How? Before lending to or borrowing from a brother, be aware of the potential hazards. Exercise caution and wisdom. Most of all, "let all your affairs," including business affairs, "take place with love."—1 Corinthians 16:14.

In Our Next Issue

- **God's Day of Vengeance**
- **Endurance That Gains the Victory**
- **Did the Early Church Teach That God Is a Trinity?**

"You Will Be With Me in Paradise"

AS HE was hanging on the execution stake, dying in agony, the criminal begged the man alongside him: "Jesus, remember me when you get into your kingdom." Jesus, even though he too was dying in excruciating pain, replied: "Truly I tell you today, You will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23: 42, 43) What a comforting hope to offer to a dying man!



Did you notice, though, that the *New World Translation*—the version quoted in the previous paragraph—puts a punctuation mark after the word "today" when rendering these words by Jesus? This conveys the thought that even on the day of his own death, Jesus was able to promise life in Paradise to that criminal. On the other hand, *The New English Bible* punctuates Jesus' words this way: "I tell you this: today you shall be with me in Paradise." Most other translations agree with *The New English Bible,* conveying the idea that Jesus and the dying criminal were going to Paradise that very day. Why the difference? And which punctuation is correct?

In fact, there was no punctuation in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the Bible. Hence, when punctuation was introduced, Bible copyists and translators had to insert it according to their understanding of Bible truth. Is, then, the traditional rendering correct? Did Jesus and the evildoer go to Paradise the day they died?

No, according to the Bible, they went to the place called in Greek *Ha'des* and in Hebrew *She'ol,* both of which refer to the common grave of mankind. (Luke 18: 31-33; 24:46; Acts 2:31) Of those in that place, the Bible says: "As for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all . . . There is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in She'ol [Greek, *Ha'des*], the place to which you are going." Hardly a paradise!—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10.

It was not until the third day that Jesus was resurrected from Hades. Then, during almost six weeks he made a number of appearances to his followers around the land of Palestine. On one of those occasions, Jesus told Mary: "I have not yet ascended to the Father." (John 20:17) So, even then he had not reached any place that could be called paradise.—Revelation 2:7.

In the third century C.E.—when the combining of Christian teaching with Greek philosophy was going on apace—Origen quoted Jesus as saying: "Today you will be with me in God's Paradise." In the fourth century C.E., church writers argued against placing a punctuation mark after "today." This shows that the traditional

way of reading Jesus' words has a long history. But it also indicates that even in the fourth century C.E., Jesus' words were read by some according to the way they are rendered in the *New World Translation.*

Today too, although many translators punctuate Luke 23:43 according to church tradition, some punctuate it like the *New World Translation.* For example, in the German translation by Professor Wilhelm Michaelis, Jesus' words read: "Truly, I give you this assurance even today: You will (some day) be together with me in Paradise."

What, then, did Jesus' words mean for the evildoer? He may have heard of the claims that Jesus is the promised King. No doubt, he knew of the title "king of the Jews" that Pilate had had inscribed and hung over Jesus' head. (Luke 23:35-38) Although the religious leaders stubbornly rejected Jesus, this repentant criminal expressed his faith, saying: "Jesus, remember me when you get into your kingdom." He did not expect to rule with Jesus, but he wanted to benefit from Jesus' rule. Hence, Jesus, even on that most difficult day, promised that the wrongdoer would be with him in Paradise.

In which paradise? In the Bible, the original Paradise was the parklike garden of Eden that our first parents lost. The Bible promises that that earthly Paradise will be restored under God's Kingdom, of which Jesus is King. (Psalm 37:9-11; Micah 4:3, 4) Hence, Jesus will be with that wrongdoer and countless other dead ones when he resurrects them from the grave to life on a paradise earth and to the opportunity of learning to do God's will and living forever. —John 5:28, 29; Revelation 20:11-13; 21: 3, 4.

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Questions From Readers

■ When someone dies, is it proper for Christians to give flowers to the family or to send flowers to the funeral home?

In some lands it is customary to do so. But using flowers at funerals has at times had a religious meaning. So let us examine the matter in some detail, especially since there are other customs that may seem to have similar links to false religion. Note comments from *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987):

"Flowers are connected to the sacred realm through their association with gods and goddesses. Flora, the Roman goddess of springtime and flowers, brings beauty and fragrance to blossoms . . . Deities may be appeased and worshiped . . . through the offering of food and flowers.

"The association of flowers with rituals of death occurs all over the world. The Greeks and Romans covered the dead and their graves with flowers. The souls of dying Buddhists in Japan are carried upward on a lotus, and the gravestones in cemeteries may rest on carved lotuses . . . Tahitians leave bouquets wrapped in ferns by the body after death and then pour floral perfume over the corpse to ease its passage into the sacred afterlife . . . Flowers may also be present at sacred times in the form of incense or perfume."

Aware that flowers have been used in connection with false religion, some Christians have felt that they should not give or send flowers for a funeral. Their feeling may also reflect a desire to avoid worldly customs, since Jesus' followers are to be "no part of the world." (John 15: 19) However, relevant Bible texts and local sentiments have a bearing on the matter.

Flowers are part of God's good gifts for the living to enjoy. (Acts 14:15-17; James 1:17) His created floral beauty has been used in true worship. The lampstand in the tabernacle was decorated with "flowers of almond . . . and blossoms." (Exodus 25:31-34) Engravings in the temple included garlands and palm trees. (1 Kings 6: 18, 29, 32) Clearly, pagan use of flowers or garlands did not mean

that true worshipers always had to avoid using them.—Acts 14:13.

What, though, about the broader issue of following customs, such as funeral customs? The Bible refers to many customs, some improper for true worshipers, others followed by God's people. First Kings 18:28 cites the "custom" of Baal worshipers of "calling at the top of their voice and cutting themselves"—a custom that true worshipers would not follow. On the other hand, Ruth 4:7 suggests no disapproval of "the custom of former times in Israel concerning the [manner of exercising the] right of repurchase."

Customs acceptable to God might even develop in strictly religious matters. When God outlined the Passover ceremony, he did not mention the use of wine, but by the first century, it was customary to use cups of wine. Jesus and his apostles did not reject this religious custom. They found it unobjectionable, and they followed it.—Exodus 12:6-18; Luke 22:15-18; 1 Corinthians 11:25.

It is similar with some funeral customs. Egyptians customarily embalmed the dead. The faithful patriarch Joseph did not automatically react, 'This is a pagan custom, so we Hebrews must avoid it.' Rather, he "commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father," evidently so that Jacob could be buried in the Promised Land. (Genesis 49:29-50:3) The Jews later developed different *funeral* customs, such as bathing the body and burying it on the day of death. Early Christians accepted such Jewish customs.—Acts 9:37.

However, what if a funeral custom is viewed as having a meaning based on religious error, such as belief in an immortal soul? Recall from the encyclopedia that some "leave bouquets wrapped in ferns by the body after death and then pour floral perfume over the corpse to ease its passage into the sacred afterlife." That there might be such a custom does not mean that God's servants must shun anything similar. While the Jews did not believe in "passage into the sacred afterlife," the Bible says: "They took the body of Jesus and bound it up with bandages with the spices, just the way the Jews have the custom of preparing for burial."—John 12:2-8; 19:40.

Christians should avoid practices that conflict with Biblical truth. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) Still, all kinds of objects, designs, and practices have, at some time or place, been given a false interpretation or have been linked with unscriptural teachings. Trees have been worshiped, the heart shape has been viewed as sacred, and incense has been used in pagan ceremonies. Does this mean that a Christian must never use incense, have trees in any decoration, or wear heart-shaped jewelry?* That is not a valid conclusion.

A genuine Christian should consider: Would following a custom indicate to others that I have adopted unscriptural beliefs or practices? The time period and location could influence the answer. A custom (or design) might have had a false religious meaning millenniums ago or might have such today in a distant land. But without going into time-consuming investigation, ask yourself: 'What is the common view where I live?' —Compare 1 Corinthians 10:25-29.

If it is well-known that a custom (or a design, such as the cross) has a false religious meaning, avoid it. Christians would thus not send flowers in the form of a cross, or a red heart if that is viewed as having religious significance. Or there may be some formal way in which flowers are used at a funeral or at a grave site that has a religious meaning locally. The Christian should avoid that too. That is not to say, though, that simply providing a bouquet at a funeral or giving flowers to a friend in the hospital must be viewed as a religious act that must be avoided.*

On the contrary, in many lands the custom of providing flowers is widespread and is viewed as an appropriate kindness. Flowers can contribute some beauty and can make a sad occasion more pleasant. They also may be a gesture of sympathy and concern. Elsewhere the custom may be to manifest such sentiments by a generous act, such as providing a meal for ill or grieving ones. (Recall the affection felt for Dorcas because she expressed her interest in and concern for others. [Acts 9:36-39]) When doing so is not clearly linked with false beliefs, some of Jehovah's Witnesses are accustomed to providing cheerful flowers for a hospitalized friend or in the case of a death. And individually they may further express their interest and feelings by practical acts. —James 1:27; 2:14-17.

* Pagans have long used floral incense in their ceremonies, but it was not wrong for God's people to employ incense in true worship. (Exodus 30:1, 7, 8; 37:29; Revelation 5:8) See also "Are They Idolatrous Decorations?" in *Awake!* of December 22, 1976.

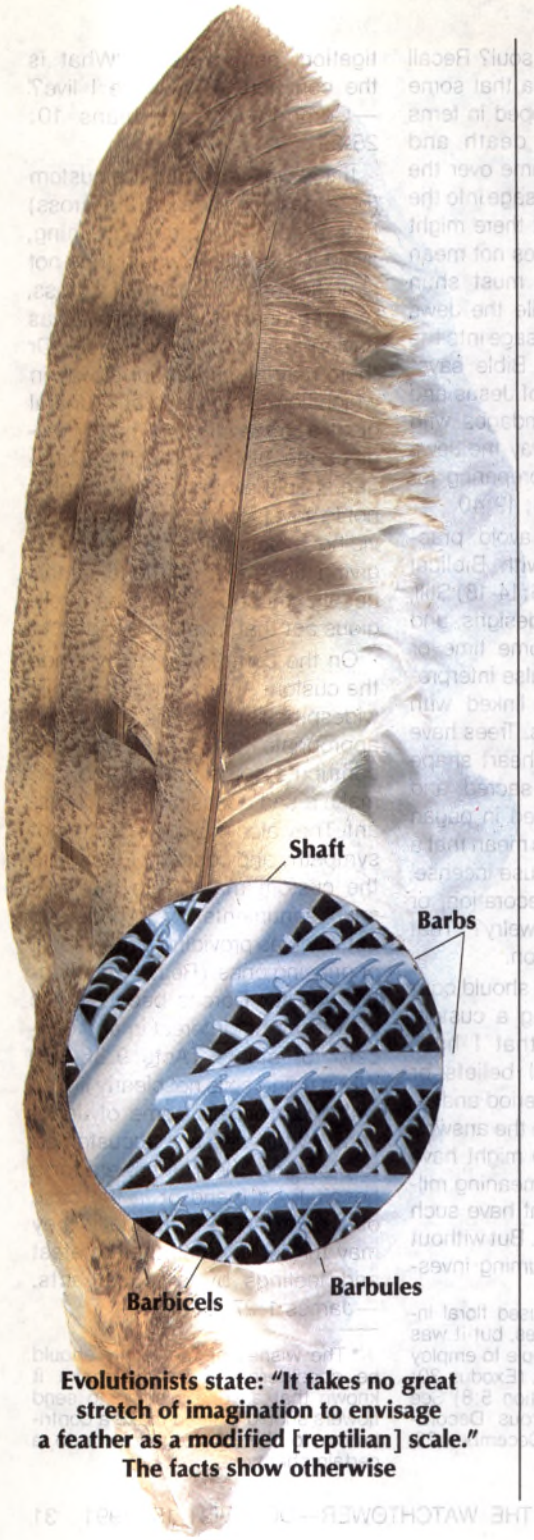
* The wishes of the family should be considered, for some make it known that anyone wishing to send flowers should instead make a contribution to the congregation or to a certain charity.

"It Woke Me Up"

That is what a woman from Washington State, U.S.A., said regarding the book *Life—How Did It Get Here? By Evolution or by Creation?* She explained:

"For four years one of Jehovah's Witnesses came to my door regularly and left *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines. She encouraged me to study. She finally got me to read the *Creation* book, and that was it. She encouraged me to pray, and that was it. This book erased all doubts, and prayer brought help from Jehovah. . . .

"I know now that God really does exist. I know his name, Jehovah. I know he listens to prayers. I know why things are the way they are. I am at peace, and my peace grows each week as I learn more."



Evolutionists state: "It takes no great stretch of imagination to envisage a feather as a modified [reptilian] scale." The facts show otherwise