

# **CORRESPONDENCE GUIDELINES**



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## ABBREVIATIONS OF PUBLICATION TITLES

<i>ed</i>	– <i>Jehovah's Witnesses and Education</i>
<i>fy</i>	– <i>The Secret of Family Happiness</i>
<i>g</i>	– <i>Awake!</i>
<i>hb</i>	– <i>How Can Blood Save Your Life?</i>
<i>it-1</i>	– <i>Insight on the Scriptures (Vol. 1)</i>
<i>it-2</i>	– <i>Insight on the Scriptures (Vol. 2)</i>
<i>km</i>	– <i>Our Kingdom Ministry</i>
<i>li</i>	– <i>Life Everlasting—In Freedom of the Sons of God</i>
<i>od</i>	– <i>Organized to Do Jehovah's Will</i>
<i>rs</i>	– <i>Reasoning From the Scriptures</i>
<i>sp</i>	– <i>Spirits of the Dead—Can They Help You or Harm You? Do They Really Exist?</i>
<i>us</i>	– <i>Unseen Spirits—Do They Help Us? Or Do They Harm Us?</i>
<i>w</i>	– <i>The Watchtower</i>
<i>yp</i>	– <i>Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work</i>

These *Guidelines*, provided to assist in answering correspondence, are to be **kept confidential**. Do not duplicate or photocopy them. As you use these, keep in mind that you are replying to a person, usually one of your brothers, or a group of them. So your response should not be merely a factual, impersonal quotation of some general guidelines. Reflect interest in the person writing and the matter posed. Likely the brother writing has in mind a specific situation or problem. You, then, should try to show understanding of that specific case and of his thinking as revealed in the inquiry. At the same time, it is advisable not to allow yourself to become emotionally involved when considering the various cases.

When the query involves a complaint or a point of controversy, often only one side of the issue is presented by the writer. It may be advisable to write to the elders and/or the traveling overseer to get their observations on the situation before replying or to advise the elders to handle the problem.—Prov. 18:13.

In answering inquiries, make every effort to **give Scriptural reasons** in your reply instead of simply stating rulings that have been made on certain matters. Be careful to apply scriptures properly.—1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16, 17; 4:2.

Reason in a kindly way with the inquirer on the Scriptural principles in-

involved. Recognize that it takes time for individuals to progress to maturity. Be careful that your reply does not reflect impatience or have a demanding tone.—Matt. 11:28-30; Rom. 14:1; 15:1; Gal. 6:1, 2; 1 Thess. 5:14.

Whenever possible, express confidence in the inquirer's desire to do what is pleasing to Jehovah, not scolding him for failure to see clearly what he should be doing.—2 Thess. 3:4, 5.

If the point about which there is a question has been specifically commented on in one of our publications in recent years, your answer should conform to what has been published. It is often helpful to refer the inquirer to the specific publication or publications that deal with the subject. This may make for shorter letters. Avoid being needlessly repetitious. Bear in mind that much of what is published on matters of conduct is **to be viewed not as law but rather as mature Christian counsel**. So it is not always necessary to think in terms of imposing sanctions if a person does not fully conform to the counsel given. Rather, his lack of understanding or failure to comply may be evidence of his need to progress to maturity, at least on the point in question. Patiently help him to progress instead of threatening him with congregational discipline if he does not at once conform. His course may affect his eligibility for special service privileges, but immaturity in itself does not bar one from being a publisher.

Many matters about which our brothers inquire are simply circumstances concerning which they must make **personal decisions**. If that is the case, say so. If there are some appropriate scriptures that bear on the issues involved, mention them. Draw the inquirer's attention to any appropriate Scriptural counsel in *Reasoning From the Scriptures* or that may be located through the *Watch Tower Publications Index*, and recommend that he consider it carefully. Encourage him to take a full view of the matter, considering not only the specific situation about which he has inquired but also what his involvement may lead to, including how it may affect his own future, his relationship with Jehovah, and his privileges of service. Urge him to consider the effect of his decision on other people, and express confidence that he does not want to stumble weaker ones. (Rom. 14:13, 19; 15:1, 2; 1 Cor. 10:23, 24, 29, 31-33; Phil. 1:9-11) Point out that simply because something is a matter for personal decision does not mean that it makes no difference what one does; rather, it is a responsibility that the individual must accept.—Gal. 6:5.

In some cases, although a matter is one that must be decided by the individual, it is advantageous to encourage the person to consider his motive, recognizing that Jehovah knows not only what we do but also why we do it. (1 Chron. 28:9; Prov. 21:2; Jer. 17:10) If he has qualms of conscience about the situation, it is best for him to avoid what troubles him. A mature Christian

does not see how close he can come to wrongdoing or worldly conduct; he stays as far away from it as possible. He knows that it is important to maintain a sensitive conscience that is clear before God.—1 Tim. 1:5, 18, 19; 1 Pet. 3:16, 21.

In many cases the question raised is one that should be **taken up with someone else**. For example, a minor should consult his parents, particularly his father. (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:20) A wife ought to consult her husband. (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18) In some matters the local elders should be consulted. (Heb. 13:7, 17) Provide direction according to the need.

When **brothers question why adjustments have been made** in our understanding of the Scriptures or in congregational procedures, it is important to perceive, to the extent possible, the attitude of the one writing. When such inquiries **are presented with respect and sincerity**, often we can be of much help. (Jude 22, 23) Commend the writer for seeking clarification and having a sincere desire to understand. If the one inquiring reflects a **challenging, disrespectful attitude**, it may be advisable first to contact the elders to determine the person's standing in the congregation and what assistance they have been able to render. In seeking to help him better comprehend the improved understanding, your reply should reflect reasonableness, not having the appearance of a rebuttal, as if you were debating with

him. If he still has difficulty accepting what has been published by “the faithful and discreet slave,” encourage him to let the matter rest while waiting upon Jehovah.—Matt. 24:45; 2 Tim. 2: 23-25; Jas. 5:19, 20; *w00* 9/1 12-13.

When a **non-Witness presents challenging questions**, often it is best to send only a brief reply that includes a brochure or a copy of a published article on the subject. In some cases it may be best not to reply without first having the elders visit him to determine his sincerity and motive. In sending the elders a copy of the person’s letter or a portion thereof, you may decide to ask that they arrange for two qualified brothers to visit him and then provide the branch office with their observations.

From time to time, pages containing revisions in this publication will be sent to the branches as replacements.

The Bible does not condemn moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages, though it does condemn drunkenness. (Ps. 104:15; Eccl. 9:7; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 1 Pet. 4:3) It is true that alcohol is potentially intoxicating and addictive, but since the Scriptures do not forbid moderate consumption of it, we should not. Jesus himself warned against heavy drinking.—g91 11/8 26-7.

An alcoholic may or may not be a drunkard. If an individual has a problem with **alcoholism** or if a member of the alcoholic's family has written for advice, refer to recent articles in *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* that provide practical advice. (w96 12/15 25-9; w93 8/15 23-6; g93 1/22 15-17; w87 8/1 3-6; w83 4/15 25-7; g82 7/8 3-12) Assistance by mature elders and others in the congregation may also help the abuser or members of his family to cope with the problems that have developed.—fy 142-6; g92 8/8 15-17; g92 5/22 3-12; g82 12/8 16-23.

**Drunkenness** is determined, not primarily by the amount of alcohol a person consumes or the level of alcohol in his blood, but by whether his behavior clearly shows that because of his overdrinking, he has lost a significant degree of control over his faculties. He may not be unconscious, but if it is clear that he is reeling and moving unsteadily or that he is hallucinating, telling fantastic stories, or exhibiting uninhibited behavior as a result of his consumption of alcohol, that is evidence that he has overindulged to the point of drunken-

ness.—Job 12:25; Ps. 107:27; Prov. 23:29-35; Jer. 25:27; *it-1* 656-7.

In cases where reproach has been brought upon the congregation by public drunkenness, judicial action may be required, even if only one incident has occurred. On the other hand, a brother may have overindulged to the point of being drunk on an occasion or two in private. If that brother is repentant, one elder might be able to handle the matter by giving good counsel. However, the coordinator of the body of elders should be informed. Allowance should be made for a situation in which one was unaware of the effects that might result when a small amount of alcohol was used while taking prescribed medication.—Luke 21:34; w96 1/15 18-19; w83 5/1 8-11.

The consumption or sale of alcoholic beverages is **legally prohibited** in some places. Of course, the use of wine for the Memorial celebration is required by God's Word.



The Bible commands Christians to obey Caesar's laws that are not in conflict with God's laws. (Acts 5:29; Rom. 13:1) Thus they can have a clear conscience and avoid punishment. If a Christian violates any aspect of Caesar's law, he must bear responsibility for that. (Rom. 13:3-5) However, the Bible does not charge the congregation or its elders with the obligation to report violations of civil and criminal law. If there is a question about such matters, elders should consult the branch office.

Most countries make a distinction between illegal aliens and **refugees** who flee from their home country to another because of unusual circumstances. An **illegal alien** is an individual who, for personal reasons, lives in a country in violation of the law. He would **not be prohibited from getting baptized** if he otherwise qualified. Onesimus became a baptized Christian while away from his lawful master. (Philem. 8-19) Normally, a person known to be an illegal alien would **not be recommended for appointment as an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer** or be used to give instruction from the platform because such a person is not exemplary with respect to his legal residence. He should not be assigned to read or asked to pray at the meetings. (1 Tim. 3:7, 10; *w79* 5/1 23; *km* 7/77 4; *w77* 3/15 191-2) He may participate in the field ministry. He may also share in non-teaching parts on the meetings, such as a student talk in the Theocratic Ministry School or a Service Meeting part.

If a brother who is an illegal alien has notified the authorities and **filed papers** with them to resolve his situation, he might be appointed as an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer even if the authorities do not act promptly but, instead, drag out the case for a long time.

A brother **employing an illegal alien (one who has not filed papers to resolve his situation)** must bear his own responsibility for possible complications resulting. If someone having special privileges in the congregation employs an illegal alien and this becomes an issue in the congregation or the government learns of it and the congregation thus comes into disrepute, the employer might have to relinquish the special privileges.—See also ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES.

If a Witness who is an illegal alien has a valid marriage license and wishes to **use the Kingdom Hall for his wedding**, that may be permitted. He is recognized by us as a publisher and licensed by Caesar to get married, so his illegal-alien status of itself would not rule out use of the Kingdom Hall for the wedding.

As to whether an alien should seek citizenship, see CITIZENSHIP.

**Refugees and deportees:** If a government grants entry to refugees and deportees, such ones are not considered to be illegal aliens, but they should comply with the alien registration laws of the country they enter.

Apostasy is a standing away from the true worship of God. It involves teaching or otherwise promoting false doctrines, supporting or promoting false religion and its holidays, and interfaith activities. (Deut. 13:13, 15; Josh. 22:22, ftn.; Acts 21:21, ftn.; 2 Cor. 6:14, 15, 17, 18; Titus 3:10, 11; 2 John 7, 9, 10) It includes action taken against Jehovah's theocratic arrangement. (Jer. 17:13; 23:15; 28:15, 16; Matt. 24:48-51; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10) It is a turning against Bible principles and away from faith in Jehovah, usually accompanied by the encouraging of other people to accept false religious ideas. The Bible clearly states the serious outcome of such a course.—2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 18:2, 4; *it-1* 126-7.

One who has **sincere doubts or questions** should be kindly aided in the spirit of Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:16-19, 23-26; and Jude 22, 23.—*w82* 9/1 20-1; *w80* 8/1 12-22.

If three elders (not a judicial committee) verify that a **baptized person has joined another religion** and intends to remain with it, a brief announcement should be made to the congregation that this one is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses. (*w86* 10/15 31) On the other hand, judicial action would be taken if a person who has not joined another religion unrepentantly continues to engage in what are clearly apostate acts, such as bowing before altars and images and sharing actively in false religious songs and prayers, which acts amount to apostasy.—Rev. 18:2, 4.

If a baptized person associated with the Christian congregation deliberately spreads (stubbornly holds to and speaks about) views and teachings contrary to Bible truth as taught by Jehovah's Witnesses, this may be or may lead to apostasy. (Rom. 16:17, 18; Titus 3:10, 11) This would include actions that promote apostate views that disrupt the unity of the congregation, causing division. If he shows no desire to receive assistance toward recovery from such serious apostate deviations, a judicial committee would be assigned to handle the case. If unrepentant, he would be disfellowshipped.\*—Prov. 6:19; *w86* 10/15 31, par. 6; *w86* 4/1 30-1; *w85* 7/15 30-1.

\* In this case, a judicial committee would handle the matter. Disfellowshipping would be appropriate because the individual was promoting apostasy in the congregation without getting directly involved in activities of another religion.

**Before an individual gets baptized**, he should have had a good opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding and to appreciate what it means to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit. (Matt. 28:19, 20) Prior to his baptism, the elders should discuss with him the questions provided through the congregation. This will help the elders to discern whether he has a clear understanding of basic Bible teachings and standards and is accepting the responsibilities of a dedicated Christian Witness.

It is certainly advisable for a person to **commence public proclamation of the good news prior to baptism**. (od 79-81; w86 7/1 24; w76 6/1 350-2) If he is not preaching the good news, it would be well to consider whether he has truly accepted the responsibility that goes with being a true Christian.—Mark 13:10; Heb. 13:15.

A person does not qualify for baptism if he is an **active member of a false religious organization**, as indicated, for example, by his attending a church or making contributions thereto. (2 Cor. 6:14-17; Rev. 18:4) If he has recently been an active member of a false religious organization or is supporting such through taxes deducted from his salary, he should withdraw from the religious organization, seek to have his name removed from the membership roll, and legally terminate the payment of the **church tax** if that is possible. A person who finds it very difficult to have his name removed from a church's membership roll should at least abstain

from attending the church and paying dues. If years have passed since he was associated with a false religious organization, he can personally determine whether he feels a need to submit a letter of resignation.

One whose life is in conflict with the teachings of God's Word such as found at Isaiah 2:2-4 should bring his affairs into line with the Bible's requirements before presenting himself for immersion.—See also EMPLOYMENT and NEUTRALITY.

Generally, a **person professing to be a husband or a wife should be legally married** before presenting himself or herself for baptism. (Heb. 13:4) With regard to those living together without the benefit of legal marriage, see MARRIAGE as well as *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1977, pages 179-85.

If couples who **had been improperly cohabiting** take up separate living accommodations and refrain from immorality, they may be accepted for baptism.—Col. 3:5-9.

Those who are now legally married are not barred from baptism because of an **unscriptural divorce that preceded the present legal union**.—Eph. 1:7; w80 1/15 30-1; w68 9/15 575-6.

If a person is actively associating with the congregation and knows that the congregation expelled a wrongdoer but nevertheless got engaged to and **married** that **disfellowshipped individual**, he would not quickly be

eligible for baptism. (Ps. 15:1, 4a) He should first show that he has come to know and agree with the congregation's action in disfellowshipping wrongdoers. But if the person married the disfellowshipped one without knowledge of the congregation's decision and its standards and later expressed a desire to learn of God's requirements, that unbaptized person could be mercifully assisted toward dedication and baptism. If the unbaptized person was already engaged to one who was subsequently disfellowshipped, marriage to the disfellowshipped one, though unwise, would not prevent baptism.

Those who willfully insist on **using addictive drugs for nonmedical purposes**, such as heroin and methadone, or other addictive substances, including tobacco, betel nut, and coca leaves, will not be accepted for baptism.—*w73* 6/1 336-43; see also TOBACCO (AND DRUGS).

There is no set age at which children may get baptized. The candidate for baptism should have reached a level of responsibility that permits him to accept, to a reasonable degree, accountability for his conduct. Thus, when a child has sufficient knowledge of Jehovah and His purposes, is faithfully adhering to the upright principles set forth in the Bible, and has made a dedication to Jehovah, he may properly symbolize his dedication by water baptism.—*w87* 4/15 12-14; *w82* 2/15 30.

If a **retarded person** is unable to answer the prescribed questions in a

reasonable (even though simple) way and thus is not able to act with real appreciation of what is stated at Matthew 28:19, 20, he can be viewed as a young child who is not in a position to be baptized.—*w87* 4/15 13; *w76* 9/15 575-6.

A person does not need to get **rebaptized** simply because he gains improved understanding or appreciation of the truth or some Scriptural doctrine. (Prov. 4:18; *w70* 5/15 308; *w64* 2/15 123-6; *w62* 6/1 332-3) However, if at the time of baptism, a person was living in a situation or engaging in a practice that could result in disfellowshipping of a baptized individual, we cannot assume that the person's dedication was acceptable to Jehovah. If a person was baptized in good faith but later found out that his or her marriage mate was a bigamist or that the mate had lied in some way about being free to marry, such would not automatically mean that the baptized mate would have to get rebaptized; it would be left up to that individual's conscience to determine what to do once the marital situation was straightened out.

A person might commit a wrong after his baptism that could result in his being disfellowshipped or his being considered disassociated. Now, for the first time, he **claims that his baptism was invalid** because he did not understand at the time of baptism what was involved in getting baptized. In that case, we would take him for what he had professed to be up until that time, a dedicated and baptized Christian. The

congregation would deal with him accordingly. (*w60 3/1 159-60*) However, if it is discovered that the very situation now giving rise to action by the congregation existed at the time of his baptism (such as using tobacco) and he nevertheless got baptized, then his baptism is not valid and he should be dealt with as an unbaptized wrongdoer.—Acts 19:1-5.

The validity of a person's baptism is not affected if it later develops that the **one who did the baptizing had not been validly baptized**. The important thing is that the male performing the baptism was at the time a representative of the Christian congregation. (1 Cor. 1:11-15) There is no Biblical evidence of **women doing baptizing**. Someone living in an **isolated** area may learn the truth and wish to become an unbaptized publisher or get baptized. A request can be made for qualified brothers in the nearest congregation to go over the necessary information in the *Organized* book with him.

**Getting baptized may be very difficult** or even hazardous in the case of one who is very old or feeble or who has a **severe health problem**. If advice is requested in such a case, you can call attention to Matthew 28:19, 20 and point out that many have overcome extraordinary situations in order to be immersed. Some have done this by having a special baptism under medical supervision. In the final analysis, the individual must determine if baptism is absolutely impossible in his case.—*w02 6/1 29; w79 5/1 31; w73 8/1 479-80*.

The Bible plainly states that God's servants must "abstain . . . from blood." (Acts 15:20, 28, 29; 21:25; Gen. 9:3, 4) The brochure *How Can Blood Save Your Life?* presents the Scriptural basis for not accepting blood transfusions or eating food containing blood. It also provides historical information on the application of this Scriptural direction to Christians, which further shows why Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept transfusions.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that accepting transfusions of **whole blood or any of the four primary blood components** (red cells, white cells, platelets, and plasma) violates God's law to "abstain . . . from blood." (Acts 15:20) This prohibition applies to a person's own blood if it is removed, stored, and then reinfused. (*w00 10/15 30-1*) An individual, though, must determine according to his own conscience whether he can accept **fractions extracted from any of the four primary components of blood.** (*w00 6/15 29-31*) Brothers can be encouraged to examine prayerfully what the Bible says about blood and to weigh their own motives and the proddings of their own consciences in making a decision.

Under the Mosaic Law, blood taken from an animal killed for food was to be disposed of, poured on the ground. (Lev. 17:13, 14; Deut. 12:15, 16, 23-25) A person can be encouraged to consider this principle in deciding for himself on medical techniques involving use of his own blood in the course of a surgical

procedure, medical test, or current therapy.—*w00 10/15 30-1.*

The extent of concern Christians should have about blood components, such as dried plasma, being added to food products is discussed on pages 30 and 31 of *The Watchtower* of October 15, 1992.

In seeking medical treatment from hospitals or doctors, brothers should be encouraged to do all they can to see that their stand on blood will be complied with, such as by trying to get firm assurance from the surgeon (or the anesthesiologist) that he will respect their stand. They should make it clear at the outset that their position on blood is not negotiable under any circumstances. Even if a transfusion is legally ordered, Christians want to obey God as Ruler rather than men. (Acts 5:29) If it is **administered to a person against his will**, there may be no guilt before God.—*w73 9/1 543-4.*

If a Christian accepts a blood transfusion, two elders should investigate. If they find that he **did willingly accept blood**, although he is now repentant, three elders (not a judicial committee) will provide spiritual assistance in the spirit of Galatians 6:1 and Jude 22, 23. He would not qualify for privileges in the congregation for a period of time. Depending on the circumstances, the elders may also need to make an announcement to the congregation. If so, it could read as follows: "The elders have handled a matter having to do with

[name of person]. You will be glad to know that spiritual shepherds are endeavoring to render assistance.”

A baptized person who willfully and unrepentantly takes a blood transfusion thereby chooses to reject the Scriptural sanctity of blood and violates God’s law. Three elders (not a judicial committee) should meet with him. If a blood transfusion has been accepted without repentance, the congregation will consider that the person has disassociated himself. It would then be announced: “[Name of individual] is no longer one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.” The matter would be dealt with as in other cases of disassociation.—*w86* 10/15 31; *w73* 9/1 543-4.

A Christian who is **a nurse or a doctor** respects the Scriptures and therefore would not recommend or order a blood transfusion for a patient. If he or she as an employee is not responsible for deciding the matter and is directed by a superior to administer a transfusion to a non-Witness, whether to obey is a matter for personal, conscientious decision.—*w99* 4/15 28-30; *w75* 4/1 215-16.

There is no Scriptural objection to the use of nonblood chemical fluids for transfusions. Whether to use such is strictly a medical decision to be made after weighing possible benefits and/or side effects.—*w84* 1/15 31; see also MEDICAL AND HEALTH TREATMENT.

It is not proper to use leeches in medical treatment to withdraw blood

from humans. This is a violation of the sanctity of blood.—*w82* 6/15 31.

It is not proper for a Christian to administer a blood transfusion to an animal owned by him or to authorize another to do so.—*w64* 2/15 127-8.

As to the proper bleeding of animals before the flesh is eaten, reference can be made to the following publications: *g73* 5/8 27-8; *w73* 4/1 224.

The individual Christian can decide how to dispose of any **unbled carcasses**, such as whether to sell these to a rendering plant or to use the flesh as bait in traps.—Deut. 14:21.

Out of respect for God’s directions, individuals should be encouraged to **avoid deliberately putting to direct use blood or blood products**, such as fertilizer or animal food made from blood. (Ex. 22:31; Deut. 12:16; *w81* 10/15 30-1; *w64* 2/15 127-8) It is wrong for a dedicated Christian to **traffic in blood in his own business**, such as by making or selling blood sausage or deliberately obtaining unbled meat because customers want it. (*w75* 4/1 215) If someone gets involved in such a business, help can be offered and time allowed for him to make adjustments. If he persists in commercializing blood, he would eventually have to be disfellowshipped, as would a person who chose to stock and sell idols or tobacco in his store. However, it would be left to the conscience of an individual as to whether he would work in a rendering plant where unbled animals were processed for animal food.

The Bible condemns murder, a sin for which a person may be disfellowshipped.—Rev. 21:8.

Bloodguilt may also be incurred if a person causes loss of life through carelessness or because of violating a traffic law or other safety law of Caesar. If a Witness is liable for someone's **death in an accident**, the elders should investigate and if warranted appoint a judicial committee to hear the matter, for the congregation wants to avoid community responsibility for bloodguilt. (Deut. 21:1-9; 22:8) Perhaps the individual will also be investigated by the government or face court action. But the government's view of the case does not altogether determine the congregation's conclusion. The court may declare him guilty of some technical violation, but the congregation may determine that no bloodguilt rests on him because he had little control over the circumstances resulting in the accident. Or the court may dismiss the case for some reason, but the congregation may conclude that bloodguilt definitely exists. Thus, the elders' decision should be based on the facts as clearly established by admissions of the accused or by testimony of two or three reliable eyewitnesses. Where bloodguilt has been determined by the committee and the person is reprov'd, restrictions will be imposed.—*w63* 8/15 510-11.



Bribery means giving or offering something valuable to a person in a position of trust so that he will violate his duty to uphold the law in order to benefit the giver. In many lands bribery is a criminal offense. The Bible plainly condemns bribery, as it distorts justice.—Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; Isa. 5:22, 23.

There is a difference between bribery and making someone a gift for services rendered. Proffering a gift or tip as an expression of appreciation or to encourage someone to perform a public service that he is legally supposed to perform is not violating the Bible's counsel against bribery. (g86 6/22 24-7) With regard to his offering a gift, the individual must personally decide what to do, taking into consideration his Christian conscience, the need to deal with officials who are not always fair, what the Bible counsels about bribery, and the importance of avoiding things that will stumble others. (1 Cor. 10:32) Love for neighbor should move Christians to avoid using money or gifts to get preferential treatment at the expense of others.—Matt. 22:39; *w86* 10/1 30-1.

In emergency situations, the brothers should be guided by Mark 13:10 and Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29.

The Scriptures state that children are a blessing from God. (Gen. 1:27, 28; Ps. 127:3) Whether a Christian couple in these last days will choose to raise children or not is a personal matter.—2 Tim. 3:1; *w88* 3/1 18-27; *g74* 11/8 9-11; *w72* 2/15 108-9.

Sometimes a Christian couple have considered allowing their **child to live with relatives** or other friends in the truth or to be raised by them. This may be for economic or other reasons. While the Bible stresses the care of children by their own parents, it is for the individual Christian parents to decide how to provide this care, whether by keeping a child at home or providing for it elsewhere in a situation that will allow for the child to **continue being aided spiritually**. (Deut. 6:6, 7; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:8) It would certainly not be good for Christian parents to give the appearance that they are neglecting or abandoning their children or that they are turning a child over to worldly relatives or others not in the truth simply because of some seeming material advantage to themselves or for the child. How parents handle such situations has a bearing on the extending of privileges, especially in connection with the father's being "irreprehensible."—1 Tim. 3:2; *w88* 9/1 28-30; *w82* 8/15 30-1; *w70* 12/1 732-5.

**Custody problems** that develop because of separation and divorce should be resolved by the parents involved, seeking to apply Bible principles in the best way they can under the circumstances and in the best interests of

the children. Decisions and directions of a court should be respected.—*g97* 12/8 3-12; *g88* 10/22 3-14; *w86* 11/1 26-31.

It is also up to a Christian couple to decide for themselves whether **adopting** a child is advisable in their case. (*g96* 5/8 3-10; *w66* 7/1 415-16) While Christians would if they have opportunity share the truth with the children of their relatives, they ought not to meddle in the affairs of others by working to gain legal control of such children simply out of an interest in helping the children to learn the truth.—*w72* 6/15 364.

Regarding baptism of children, including a **retarded child**, see BAPTISM.

For other points involving children, see FAMILY AFFAIRS.

Whether one should apply for citizenship is entirely a personal decision. It is not necessary that one be a citizen in order to be baptized or to preach the good news of the Kingdom. It should be remembered that regardless of the nation of which Jehovah's Witnesses are citizens or the part of the earth in which they happen to live, Jehovah is capable of protecting all those who serve him. A major factor to consider is whether the naturalization procedure requires that an individual violate Isaiah 2:2-4; Exodus 20:3, 4; or John 15:19.—See also ALIEN (ILLEGAL).

Clothing and grooming styles vary around the world. (g76 8/8 24-6; w66 12/1 735-6) The Bible, in giving sound counsel to Christian sisters, sets forth basic principles that should guide men and women in the Christian congregation as to appropriate clothing and grooming. Thus, the basic question to consider is whether a certain style would befit someone “professing to reverence God.” (1 Tim. 2:9, 10; w02 8/1 17-19; w01 1/15 5) As ministers, we are under scrutiny, and therefore mere personal preference should not be the deciding factor. (1 Cor. 4:9; w75 8/15 499-501) Consideration should be given to the effect our clothing and grooming will have on the consciences of others, inside and outside the congregation. (g79 4/22 27-8; w73 3/1 137-40) Our choice of styles should reflect the fact that we represent Jehovah.—g98 8/8 20-1; w97 6/15 16-18; w88 8/15 17; w87 9/15 14-15.

It is not wise to look to the world for standards on the subject of clothing and grooming. The Bible itself sets out principles to guide Christians. Without making rigid rules or getting involved in giving yes or no answers, elders should recommend what is appropriate dress and grooming by explaining Bible principles. (w77 3/1 149-50; w72 4/1 222-4) Draw attention to these, and encourage the brothers to make their decisions accordingly.

### **Scriptural principles about appropriate dress and grooming**

Modesty is a Scriptural requirement.—Prov. 11:2; Mic. 6:8.

Married women wisely consider the wishes of their husbands.—1 Cor. 7:34; Eph. 5:22-24.

Minors should obey their parents (or guardians), submitting to their decisions.—Prov. 1:8, 9; Col. 3:20.

Consider the effect on the attitude of others toward the congregation and its activity.—1 Cor. 10:29, 31, 32; 2 Cor. 4:2; Jas. 2:2.

Personal cleanliness and neatness are desirable.—2 Cor. 7:1.

When replying to specific inquiries on clothing and grooming, the following references in our publications may be helpful. **Provocative dress:** w87 9/15 14-15; w75 8/15 499-501; w72 4/1 222-4. **Hairstyles:** w91 6/1 30-1; w91 3/15 30; w73 3/1 140-1; w69 2/15 114-15; w68 3/15 191. **Jewelry and cosmetics:** w91 6/1 30-1; w91 3/15 30. **The wearing of a beard:** g79 4/22 27-8; w75 8/15 500-501; w73 3/1 137-40. **Body piercings and decorations:** g00 8/8 18-19; g00 3/22 11-13.

**Wearing clothing of the opposite sex** is not proper if it is done for immoral purposes or in order to deceive another person. (Deut. 22:5) But this does not prohibit all wearing of slacks, work pants, ski suits in winter, and so forth, on the part of women.—w84 7/15 24-5; g76 8/8 25-6; w72 11/1 671-2; see also SEXUAL CONDUCT.

Jehovah’s organization has provided suggestions in the publications on appropriate attire for Christian meetings,

## CLOTHING AND GROOMING (Cont'd)

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for the ministry, and for visiting branch homes.—*w98* 4/1 30; *km* 3/98 7; *od* 138.

It should not be necessary to establish a lot of rules to govern what is acceptable on the platform or in the field service, but if styles are **extreme** or cause offense or stumbling, appropriate counsel can be given.—*w77* 3/1 149-50; *w75* 4/1 219; *w73* 3/1 138-9; *w72* 4/1 222-4; *km* 2/69 7.

At all times, a Christian should conduct himself in such a way that no reproach is brought upon Jehovah or upon the congregation of God's people. (Gal. 5:19-25; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:11, 12; 2 Pet. 2:2; 1 John 2:15-17) The Bible condemns fornication and all types of sexual uncleanness. (Acts 15:29; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3) The desires of the flesh must be controlled if chasteness is to be maintained.—Rom. 13:14; Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 5:2; 2 Tim. 2:22.

Much has been published to help single persons to avoid getting involved in situations that could lead to sexual immorality. (*w*99 9/1 13-18; *g*93 10/22 20-2; *yp* 181-260; *w*86 11/1 16-20; *w*86 8/1 10-15; *w*82 10/15 20-30; *g*82 6/8 16-18; *w*82 6/1 3-4; *g*82 4/8 16-19; *w*81 11/1 8-14) It is always good to refer to articles in the publications that discuss the specific point inquired about. While such material presents helpful counsel in many areas, it is not to be construed as law to be enforced in every instance. Yet, where there is a clear violation of Scriptural principles, this should be recognized and appropriate counsel should be given.

Sometimes persons of the opposite sex become passionately aroused in their expressions of affection and share in **unclean conduct**, such as momentary touching of the sexual parts or caressing of the breasts. These individuals should be given warning counsel and spiritual help, for such uncleanness is strongly condemned in God's Word. (Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:7) Such a course can easily lead them into

loose, brazen conduct, which is wanton and shameless wrongdoing, or into some form of *por-nei'a*. **Por-nei'a** involves two or more parties (including another human or a beast) whether of the opposite or of the same sex. *Por-nei'a* involves the use of the genital organs in a natural or a perverted way with lewd intent. Willing participation incurs guilt and requires judicial action. Such participation is not a momentary casual touching of the sex organs but involves the manipulation of the genitals with lewd intent. (*w*08 5/15 27; *w*06 7/15 29-31; *w*83 6/1 23-6; *w*83 3/15 30-1; *w*73 9/15 574-6) It can involve oral and anal sex, mutual masturbation, and homosexuality.

When an individual makes a practice of engaging in immoral conversations by **telephone** or **Internet chat rooms** or by similar **electronic means**, this can constitute obscene speech and/or loose, brazen conduct, either of which can be a basis for judicial action.—*g*00 1/22 20-1; *km* 11/99 4.

There might be some exceptional situation, such as sudden onset of severe illness or extreme weather conditions, that resulted in the two individuals of the opposite sex staying overnight alone in the same house. Such would not be wise and could give the impression that wrongdoing occurred. A judicial committee might be formed to handle the matter. If the couple insisted that they did so only because of rare, extenuating circumstances and that no wrongdoing did occur, the committee might become absolutely convinced no disfellowship-

ping offense took place. So they might recommend to the body of elders that the committee be dissolved.

**Dating** by those Scripturally free to marry is a personal matter, keeping in mind the Scriptural command to marry “only in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 7:39) The publications contain much practical counsel on dating, courtship, and engagement, making proper allowance for local customs. (*yp* 219-60; *g01* 12/22 25-7; *g89* 2/22 21-3; *w86* 11/15 26-30; *g82* 6/8 16-18; *w61* 3/15 183-5) If one or both of the single individuals are still under parental supervision, the parents involved will decide when dating will begin and to what extent chaperoning will be arranged.

When a brother and a sister are betrothed (engaged), it is right for them and others to expect that marriage will follow. While an **engagement to marry** should be taken very seriously, circumstances could develop that might prompt one or both of them to end the engagement.—*w99* 8/15 30-1.

Minors should be helped to appreciate that the decisions they are inquiring about probably rest with their parents, particularly the father. (Col. 3:20) You may help them and their parents by drawing attention to the Scriptures and to articles in the publications that specifically discuss the questions raised.

Those who practice the things that are mentioned at 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 and Romans 1:24-27 and those who endeavor to corrupt others with their uncleanness or wanton loose, brazen con-

duct cannot be part of the Christian congregation.—Jude 3, 4.

Regarding dating a person not Scripturally and legally free, see DIVORCE.

At 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, God's Word gives the guidelines for Christians to follow. Rather than resort to secular courts, Christians should settle matters in harmony with Bible principles.—*w*97 3/15 17-22; *w*91 10/15 25-8; *w*77 3/1 147; *w*73 11/15 703-4.

When personal problems or differences between brothers cannot be settled by them, the elders in the congregation may be able to help. Serious wrongs that escalate to the third step of Matthew 18:15-17 should, of course, be given attention by elders serving in a judicial capacity so that the congregation can take appropriate action whenever necessary.—*w*99 10/15 12-22.

In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, congregation members should look to the elders for help in resolving "matters of this life." The elders should use the principles of God's Word to assist. Therefore, as a general rule, congregation members should not feel the need to go to a secular court for relief and justice. However, there may be cases that go beyond the authority of the congregation and that one or more of those involved wish to present to a court for judgment. When that is deemed necessary, the litigants should certainly not do so with an adversarial spirit or to obtain more than a reasonable settlement.

Cases that may require court action include getting a divorce decree, which may involve child custody and support as well as alimony; obtaining insurance compensation (see below); getting listed

among creditors in bankruptcy procedures; probating wills; and filing certain countersuits. Such instances need not be viewed as going contrary to the spirit of Paul's advice found in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. For example, a worldly creditor might sue a brother who is innocent of any wrongdoing. In turn, this brother, in defending himself, might be put in a position of having to file a countersuit, naming others who are involved, perhaps including spiritual brothers.—*w*94 9/15 30-1; see also DIVORCE.

There may also be cases involving automobile accidents in which a person is injured while in the automobile of a spiritual brother, and the only way to get compensation from an insurance company for covering medical or other expenses is by suing the brother who is insured. Of course, if the brother is not insured and the one who was a passenger knew that, the passenger bears considerable personal responsibility for his own injuries. To sue under those circumstances would violate the spirit of Paul's counsel to the Corinthians.—*w*63 3/1 160.

In these exceptional circumstances, each individual must make his own decision as to what he will do or how he will handle matters. However, there may be other circumstances that warrant action by the congregation. If it is apparent that a person has demonstrated greed or vindictiveness in pursuing a matter in court, this may call into question his enjoying congregation privileges.—See also LEGAL MATTERS.



If a baptized person insists that he does not want to be part of the congregation or be one of Jehovah's Witnesses, it would be well for him to put his decision in writing and sign it, and that signed statement should be retained in the congregation files. (1 John 2:19) If he refuses to write such a statement but states resolutely before witnesses his decision to disassociate himself and not be known as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, the witnesses should be asked to put this in writing and sign it. The branch office should be notified of his disassociation. The congregation should be informed by a brief announcement that he is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses. He should be treated as a disfellowshipped person. Being disassociated, he would have to apply for reinstatement in the regular way, as in the case of disfellowshipped persons, in order to become a member of the congregation again.—*w82 1/15 31; w81 9/15 23.*

If a person is charged with unchristian conduct that would warrant his being disfellowshipped and thereafter seeks to disassociate himself from the congregation, either by submitting a letter of resignation to the congregation or by making a verbal statement before witnesses that he no longer wishes to be viewed as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, such statement of disassociation will be considered and *accepted even after a judicial process has commenced*, thus making further judicial action unnecessary. However, the procedure in the preceding paragraph should be followed in handling matters to completion.

Regarding one who disassociates himself because of taking a nonneutral course, see NEUTRALITY.

A baptized person who joins another religious organization is considered to have disassociated himself from the Christian congregation. Three elders (not a judicial committee) will review the facts and confirm that this one has actually joined another religion. A brief announcement will be made to inform the congregation that he is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses.—*w86 10/15 31; see also APOSTASY.*

A baptized person who willfully and unrepentantly **takes a blood transfusion** thereby chooses to reject the Scriptural sanctity of blood and violates God's law. Three elders (not a judicial committee) should examine the facts. If they determine that he has accepted a blood transfusion without repentance, the congregation will consider him as having disassociated himself.—See also BLOOD.

When writing to brothers regarding disfellowshipping (expelling, or expulsion, from the congregation), help them to appreciate the Scriptural basis for the action. (*it-1* 787-8) Some **practices for which disfellowshipping is a possibility** include:

**Apostasy:** Deliberately teaching (stubbornly holding to and propagating) things contrary to Bible truth as taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. This would include participating in, supporting, or promoting false religion and its holidays or actively sharing in interfaith activities.—Deut. 13:13, 15; 2 Cor. 6:14, 15, 17, 18; Titus 3:10, 11; 2 John 7, 9, 10; Rev. 18:4; *w86* 3/15 10-15; *w83* 4/1 17-25; *w80* 8/1 17-22; see also APOSTASY.

**Drunkennes:** This condition results from overindulgence in alcohol to the point where, as indicated by a person's behavior, there is significant impairment and loss of control of his faculties.—1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9, 10; see also ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES.

**Failure to abstain from blood**  
—See BLOOD and DISASSOCIATION.

**Fits of anger, violence:** Habitual, uncontrolled expressions of anger are classed with other detestable works of the flesh that can keep one from inheriting God's Kingdom. Uncontrolled anger often leads to acts of violence that hurt or maim or even result in the death of another person.—Prov. 22:24, 25; Mal. 2:16; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:31.

**Fornication (*por-nei'a*):** *Por-nei'a* involves the use of the geni-

tal organs in a natural or a perverted way with lewd intent. There are two or more parties (either another human or a beast) involved, whether of the opposite or of the same sex. It is not a casual touching of the genitals but involves their manipulation with lewd intent. Willing participation incurs guilt and requires judicial action. Being raped is not *por-nei'a*. Discernment is needed in considering **claims of rape**, taking into account mental disposition, circumstances that led up to the alleged rape, any delay in reporting, and so forth. (Lev. 20:10, 13, 15, 16; Deut. 22:23-29; Rom. 1:24, 26, 27, 32; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; *w83* 3/15 30-1; *w73* 10/1 592-3; *w73* 9/15 574-6) Regarding oral or anal sex within marriage, see FAMILY AFFAIRS.

**Greed—gambling, extortion, gluttony:** Gambling involves venturing a wager, or stake, and can be seen to reflect greed. Small wagers for entertainment call for counsel, but unrepentant pursuit of a course of greediness by gambling can lead to disfellowshipping. (1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6:10; Eph. 5:5; *w80* 9/1 29-30; see also GAMBLING.) Gluttony is greedy excess in eating, or voracious overeating, no matter whether a person is obese or thin. The Bible condemns gluttony, but determining when it exists is not easy. There may be physical or medical reasons why a person is overweight. Thus, elders should exercise great care in evaluating whether judicial action is necessary when circumstances exist that suggest gluttony.—*w86* 5/1 31.

**Hypnotism:** Form of spiritism, since a person is bound by a spell.

—Deut. 18:11, 12; Gal. 5:19-21; see also MEDICAL AND HEALTH TREATMENT.

**Loose, brazen conduct:** A shocking, flagrant disregard for Jehovah's moral standards but not limited to acts of sexual immorality. (Gal. 5:19; *w08 5/15 27*; *w06 7/15 29-31*; *w83 3/15 31*; *w73 9/15 574-6*) The nature, circumstances, attitude manifested, and actual extent of what occurred may indicate loose, brazen conduct, which would require judicial action. It may include the willful practice of heavy petting or the fondling of breasts. It may also include dating when not Scripturally free after repeated counsel and marking. —See also DIVORCE.

**Lying, bearing false witness:** All lying is wrong, but not all lying is a judicial offense. Lying is not merely exaggerations, misleading statements, or overstatements of facts. It must be deliberate (willful, being aware of consequences) and malicious (harboring ill will or enmity).—Lev. 19:16; Deut. 19:16-19; Prov. 6:16, 19; Col. 3:9; Rev. 22:15; *g00 2/8 20-1*; *it-2 244-5*.

**Misuse of tobacco and nonmedical use of addictive drugs:** The nicotine in tobacco is clearly an addictive drug that enslaves the body and mind. Similarly, the use of other addictive drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and betel nut, for recreational purposes is enslaving and is unacceptable in the Christian congregation. (Mark 15:23; 2 Cor. 7:1) The use of addictive drugs under medical supervision, such as for pain management, is a personal matter.

**Murder, manslaughter, attempted suicide:** The deliberate killing of a human should be distinguished from involuntary manslaughter. (Num. 35:20-24; Deut. 19:4-6, 11-13; Prov. 6:17; John 8:44; Rom. 1:29; 1 John 3:15; Rev. 21:8) Death caused by careless driving or poor maintenance of one's automobile or other careless or thoughtless action is not deliberate murder, but it may result in bloodguilt. (Deut. 22:8; *w63 8/15 510-11*) Do not rush to deal judicially with one who has attempted **suicide**. In most cases, a judicial hearing is not required. Deal kindly with such a person.—See also BLOODGUILT.

**Obscene speech:** Speech characterized by references to and promotion of what is grossly immoral, degrading, and corrupting.—Eph. 4:29; 5:3-5; Col. 3:8; Jas. 1:21; *w83 2/1 3-7*; *w63 3/1 153-6*.

**Physical uncleanness (extreme):** Every effort should be made to help the offender see the need to keep his body and/or place of residence physically clean. Before disfellowshipping would be considered, elders would need to be certain that the uncleanness is pronounced and offensive, bringing much reproach upon Jehovah's good name and his people in the community. Appropriate counsel should be given. If this is not heeded, then 'marking' may be necessary. (2 Thess. 3:14) If there is blatant, willful disregard of the counsel given and the extreme unclean, offensive conditions continue, disfellowshipping action may be necessary.—Deut. 23:12-14; 2 Cor. 7:1.

**Refusal to provide for family:** Adamant refusal to provide for wife and/or children when having the means to do so, leaving them destitute.—1 Tim. 5:8; *w88* 11/1 22-3; *km* 9/73 8.

**Reviling, slander:** Habitual and intentional vilifying of others by insulting, derogatory, or abusive speech.—Prov. 6:16, 19; 11:12, 13; 28:25; 1 Cor. 6:10; *it-1* 989-91; *it-2* 801-2.

**Stealing, fraud:** Stealing is the deliberate taking of that which belongs to another without his permission. Fraud is the intentional use of deception, trickery, or perversion of truth for the purpose of inducing a person to part with some valuable thing or to give up a legal right.—Zech. 5:3, 4; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 4:28; *it-1* 870; *it-2* 1093.

**Nonneutral activities:** Isa. 2:4; John 6:15; 17:16; see also NEUTRALITY and DISASSOCIATION.

The disfellowshipping of a person from the global Christian congregation may serve to jolt him to his senses. It also serves to protect the congregation from that one's bad influence.—*w81* 9/1 22-7; *w77* 11/15 693-8; *w77* 6/1 348.

There is **no such thing as automatic disfellowshipping**. In each case, the circumstances have to be weighed. Did the person act with reasonably complete knowledge or against counsel previously given? What is his attitude toward the wrong that could merit disfellowshipping? Is the individual repentant? (*w95* 1/1 27-31; *w77* 3/1 150-2; *w72* 7/15 436-40) Are there works

befitting repentance? (Acts 26:20) For additional comments on disfellowshipping, see WRONGDOING, HANDLING CASES OF.

Regarding limited association that might be accorded disfellowshipped relatives, both inside the home and outside the home, see *km* 8/02 3-4; *w91* 4/15 20-5; *w83* 1/1 30-1; and *w81* 9/15 26-31.

It would be wrong for a Christian to associate with, date, or **marry a disfellowshipped person**. (2 Cor. 6:14, 15, 17) This would be true even if a couple was already engaged but not yet married at the time one of them was disfellowshipped. Deciding whether to continue the engagement or to break it would be a personal matter. However, if a baptized Christian unwisely married a disfellowshipped person to whom he or she was engaged, no judicial action would be taken.

A Christian should not date or remarry a disfellowshipped former mate from whom the Christian was divorced on both legal and Scriptural grounds, since this would amount to deliberate association with a disfellowshipped person. As necessary, elders should offer counsel on the need to obey the Scriptural requirement "to quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is" disfellowshipped. (1 Cor. 5:11) If a Christian rejects counsel and decides to throw his or her lot in with a disfellowshipped person by entering into a new marriage with that one from whom he or she was Scripturally divorced, disfellowshipping would be necessary.

However, when a couple are legally but not Scripturally divorced, the congregation would not intervene if they decided to remarry legally. While there might be any number of reasons why a person would be taking an unwise course in remarrying a former mate who is disfellowshipped, *if a Scriptural divorce is not involved but only a legal divorce*, then in God's eyes the marriage is still in force. To legalize such a marriage again is a personal matter and not a basis for disfellowshipping. As regards an unbaptized person's marrying a disfellowshipped individual, see BAPTISM.

The elders may exhort and aid a **disfellowshipped person who is manifesting a repentant attitude**. (*w96 11/1 14, 16; w91 4/15 21-3; w81 9/15 25*) The objective of such discussions, based on the Bible and the publications, should be purely restorative and corrective; the elders should not have spiritual fellowship with that one. It would not be in order for an elder to undertake a regular Bible study with a disfellowshipped person.—*km 12/80 8*.

A disfellowshipped person is free to attend **meetings at the Kingdom Hall**. However, he must sit quietly and may not participate in the meeting or converse with others in attendance. The person may attend even if he was disfellowshipped for apostasy and may be suspected of having bad motives in attending. If a private home is being used as a Kingdom Hall and a disfellowshipped person is evidently making an effort to return, he might be permitted to attend the meetings in the home if

the householder does not object. However, if the only meeting held in the home is the Congregation Book Study, the disfellowshipped person may not attend.—*km 11/74 4*.

Disfellowshipped persons are not to receive copies of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, since these are only for those in good standing.

If someone in the congregation celebrates his own or another person's **birthday**, try kindly and patiently to recover him. Show him that birthday celebrations have frequently been linked with astrology. (*it-1 319*) Christ Jesus directed his followers to commemorate his death, not his birth. (Matt. 26:26-29) This agrees with the principle stated at Ecclesiastes 7:1. The only two birthday celebrations recorded in the Bible were in honor of wicked men. In each case an execution or a murder was involved. (Gen. 40:20; Matt. 14:6, 10) An individual would not normally be disfellowshipped for celebrating a birthday. However, if someone persists in strongly advocating the celebrating of birthdays or actively solicits birthday-associated business, thus openly encouraging such celebrations and hence creating division, disfellowshipping may be in order. (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10) But each case has to be considered on its own merits.—*w98 10/15 30-1; w80 7/15 30-1; g76 7/8 27-8*.

As to personal prayers concerning **disfellowshipped persons**, see "Questions From Readers" in *The Watchtower* of December 1, 2001. At judicial

committee hearings, it is proper for the judicial committee to pray beforehand but not in the presence of a disfellowshipped person. This also holds true at sessions of a judicial committee to hear a plea for reinstatement by a disfellowshipped person.

For direction on handling cases of unbaptized wrongdoers, see *w89* 2/15 29 and *w88* 11/15 18-20; see also WRONGDOING, HANDLING CASES OF.

See also REINSTATEMENT.

The Christian congregation does **not encourage anyone to separate from a marriage mate or to seek a divorce.** (*w00* 11/1 4-5) The Scriptures urge marriage mates to remain together as “one flesh.” Though not encouraging separation, the Bible does allow for it. (Gen. 2:22-24; Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:10-16) If there are no Scriptural grounds (“fornication”), the congregation will view any legal divorce as merely a separation, inasmuch as the divorced ones are not Scripturally free to remarry. Those who feel that they have valid reason for separation or divorce should be helped to appreciate that they must make their own decision and bear the responsibility for it. They can be encouraged to read what has been published on marriage and marital problems.

Depending upon the problem involved, you might recommend practical information from one or more pertinent articles. For instance, when Scriptural grounds exist for divorce: *g99* 4/22 3-12; *g97* 4/8 23-5; *w88* 11/1 15-25; *w83* 12/15 27-9; *w83* 3/15 27-31; *g82* 6/8 9-12. When cause for separation may seem to exist but no sexual immorality is involved: *g01* 11/8 12; *fy* 142-62; *g93* 2/8 13-14; *w88* 11/1 20-5; *w81* 7/1 17-22; *w75* 5/1 286-8; *w63* 9/15 569-75. To resolve problems, it would be a fine thing for the husband and wife to read selected material together, such as *g01* 1/8 3-14; *w99* 7/15 21-3; *w93* 8/1 3-8; *w91* 12/15 19-21; *w83* 6/1 12-22; *g74* 4/22 5-12. You might also suggest that they

have an elder review some of this material with them.—*km* 9/73 8.

Frequently, the solving of marital problems requires, first of all, that the offended one follow the principle indicated at Matthew 5:23, 24. The development of serious problems in marriage is likely the result of one or both mates’ not fully applying Bible principles in their relationship. With a desire to strengthen their marriage ties and build up their spirituality, the marriage **mates should kindly but frankly discuss the problem together.** The offended one should not conclude beforehand that there is no use doing so because the other mate will not listen.—Ps. 139:23, 24; 1 Cor. 13:7, 8; *g01* 1/8 3-14; *g99* 4/22 5-9; *w93* 8/15 4-7; *g86* 1/8 3-5.

When **letters** about domestic difficulties are received, no matter how strongly they may stir your sympathies toward the inquirer, remember that you have usually heard **only one side** of the matter. (Prov. 18:13, 17) When giving Scriptural counsel in reply, even if the inquirer seems to be in the right, encourage him or her to determine whether there is anything that he or she has done to aggravate the situation. In answering letters that involve married persons, **always keep in mind the Scriptural principle of headship**, letting it guide your reply. (1 Cor. 11:3) In many cases the husband may be an unbeliever but will be reading the reply. If respect for his headship is encouraged, this may impress him and help him to improve the situation.

The Bible plainly states that divorce must be on account of “fornication” in order to free the innocent mate to remarry. (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) The term “fornication” is a rendering of the Greek word *por-nei'a* and includes all forms of illicit sexual relations outside of Scriptural marriage. (*it-1* 862-4) For details on the **meaning of *por-nei'a*** and what the term includes for valid Scriptural divorce and remarriage, see *w78* 2/15 30-2 and *w83* 3/15 31; see also FAMILY AFFAIRS.

Keep in mind that *por-nei'a* involves two or more parties (either another human or a beast), whether of the opposite or the same sex. *Por-nei'a* involves the use of the genital organs in a natural or a perverted way with lewd intent. Willing participation incurs guilt. In view of the foregoing, self-abuse is not *por-nei'a*, nor would one who was raped be guilty of *por-nei'a*.—*w74* 3/1 160.

Jesus said: “What God has yoked together let no man put apart.” Jesus allowed only one exception, that of fornication (*por-nei'a*), as a basis for divorce that breaks the marriage bond. Death also terminates a marriage. (Matt. 19:6-9; 1 Cor. 7:39) Jesus granted equal right of divorce to the innocent wife and to the innocent husband when the other mate commits fornication. (Mark 10:11, 12) This was a tightening up of marriage for Christians in contrast with what was allowed under the Hebrew arrangement. (Deut. 24:1; Matt. 19:10, 11) Any **divorce freeing a Christian for remarriage should be obtained by the innocent**

**mate** if that is possible or by the guilty mate with the consent of the innocent mate who desires to be free from the adulterous one.

Fornication, or illicit sexual relations outside the “one flesh” marriage union, does **not automatically break the marriage** in God’s sight. (Matt. 19:6, 9) The innocent mate can decide whether to extend forgiveness. The elders should not seek to influence the innocent party’s decision. They should be very careful in evaluating the evidence as to whether the innocent mate has a basis for a Scriptural divorce. They may need to check with the branch office first. (*w81* 3/1 30-1) If one mate has committed adultery but then makes confession and manifests sincere repentance, love for that mate or other considerations may lead the innocent mate to forgive the wrongdoer. The innocent mate would show unqualified forgiveness by a resumption of sexual relations with the guilty mate. (*w81* 3/1 30-1) It would be expected that the innocent mate would make his or her decision within a reasonable length of time. The elders should encourage the innocent mate to weigh all the factors before resuming sexual relations.—1 Cor. 13:4-8; 1 Pet. 4:8.

Where the innocent mate refuses to decide whether to forgive the adulterous mate, showing this by refusal of sexual relations, and the indecision continues for some time, say a year or years, this could be evidence that the innocent mate has really rejected the offending one. Similarly, over a compara-



ble period, if the innocent mate claims to have forgiven but refuses to live in the same home or, though living in the same home, unilaterally refuses to have sexual relations with the guilty party, the adulterous mate may conclude that he or she has been rejected. (1 Cor. 7: 3-5) In such instances, the guilty mate, if not disfellowshipped, could establish with the elders that he or she has actually been rejected and could notify the mate of intent to obtain a legal divorce, subsequent thereto being free to remarry.—*w74* 11/1 671-2.

If the guilty, **adulterous mate is the one who unilaterally obtains a legal divorce**, this of itself does not result in that one's Scriptural freedom to remarry. (Matt. 5:32) A person does not give himself grounds for Scriptural divorce by committing adultery. Rather, he provides the innocent mate with such grounds. The innocent mate may thereafter reject the guilty one on the basis of that one's adultery and notify the elders of the congregation to that effect. This procedure, in conjunction with a legal divorce, comes to be the equivalent of the innocent party's Scripturally divorcing the guilty one and frees the innocent mate for a Scriptural remarriage. (Mark 10:11, 12) Thus, the guilty one also is now free to remarry.

If the guilty mate, although forgiven by the innocent one, obtains a legal divorce and remarries, he is entering into an adulterous marriage, which also merits congregational action in addition to any action already taken. Of course, such a remarriage by the guilty mate

would free the innocent mate to remarry. After one has come to a knowledge of the truth and been baptized, entering into an adulterous marriage (putting away an innocent mate and marrying another person) puts in question the eligibility of that one's **servicing in an official position in the congregation after reinstatement** at least until the death or remarriage of the first mate.—1 Tim. 3:2, 12; *w80* 9/15 31.

The situation could change for a brother who has not been qualified to serve because of having divorced unscripturally an innocent mate and having married another person, as described above. His first wife (the innocent mate who was willing to forgive his adultery) might remarry, proving she no longer wished to be married to him. Or she might commit *por-nei'a* without remarrying; her immorality could be used as evidence that she rejects him. He then would no longer be in an adulterous marriage. Depending on whether the notoriety of his past course has died down and he is viewed as a good example, he might qualify in time for some privileges in the congregation.

**Evidence of *por-nei'a*:** (1) Admission of guilt to at least two credible persons by the one charged with adultery is sufficient evidence. (2) If there is STRONG *circumstantial evidence* but not positive proof, the burden may be allowed to rest with the conscience of the innocent one. There ought to be at least two witnesses to the circumstantial evidence, preferably witnesses of the same

incident. For example, there may be two or more witnesses to establish that the accused stayed all night in the same house with a person of the opposite sex (or in the same house with a known homosexual) under improper circumstances. (*w*68 4/15 255) If, however, the one charged with immorality is a believer, a judicial committee should endeavor to meet with him to give consideration to what he has to say, thereafter taking whatever action is warranted. The fact that a Christian's mate was discovered to have and perhaps passed on to the Christian a sexually transmitted disease would not of itself be conclusive proof of unfaithfulness; such diseases can be contracted in ways other than through sexual relations. (3) If a Christian submits a written statement saying that his or her **unbelieving** (or **disfellowshipped** or **disassociated**) mate personally confessed that he or she had committed *por-nei'a*, the elders can accept the believer's testimony if there is no reason to conclude otherwise. They can allow the responsibility for the conclusion that adultery has occurred to rest with the conscience of the innocent mate; this applies only when the guilty party is an unbeliever.—Prov. 6:17, 19; *w*77 10/1 607-8.

If a divorce is obtained on unscriptural grounds and the guilty party did not divulge his or her committing of adultery before the divorce, then Scripturally the marriage bond remains binding in spite of the divorce. But if the innocent mate discovers that predivorce adultery was committed and therefore

now rejects the guilty mate because of that and makes it known to the elders of the congregation, this, in effect, constitutes a dissolution of the marriage on Scriptural grounds and frees both parties to remarry.

Fornication during an engagement period with a person other than the one to whom the immoral one is engaged is not grounds for Scriptural divorce by the innocent mate upon finding the wrong out after marriage.—*w*99 8/15 30-1; see also MARRIAGE.

Perhaps a **Christian couple** experience marital difficulties and consider getting a **legal separation or divorce**. God's Word encourages a Christian couple to avoid permanent separation. (Matt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; *w*69 12/15 741) The elders should do what they can to help these Christians apply Bible principles and make peace. If, nonetheless, they get a divorce, they have to accept responsibility for any problems resulting. What if one of them later commits *por-nei'a*? The innocent party must decide whether to forgive or not. Forgiveness would involve willingness to get legally married again and then live as husband and wife. (*w*81 3/1 30-1) If the innocent party is not willing to do that, the guilty mate (already legally divorced) would be Scripturally free to remarry. The judicial committee should carefully investigate whether there is evidence that the guilty one might have schemed or shared in collusion in order to gain Scriptural freedom, for if that was the case, it would have a bearing on any claims of re-

pentance over the *por-nei'a* committed.—*w*79 11/15 31-2; *w*74 11/1 671-2; *g*64 10/22 27-8.

If after learning of a mate's *por-nei'a*, the innocent mate willingly **resumes having sexual relations**, that **indicates forgiveness** of the erring one, and the forgiven *por-nei'a* cannot thereafter be used as a basis for a Scriptural divorce—even if a later claim is made that the forgiveness was not genuine. However, forgiveness of one instance of *por-nei'a* does not necessarily mean forgiveness of **other unrevealed instances**. Should new evidence regarding additional past immorality come to light, the innocent mate could obtain a Scriptural divorce on the basis of that immorality. If the adultery occurred many years ago (perhaps even before baptism) and the couple have been living together peacefully for an extended period of time, the innocent mate would likely have a good basis on which to consider extending forgiveness after first hearing of the mate's infidelity in the distant past.—*fy* 159; *w*81 3/1 30-1; *w*74 8/15 511-12.

It is to be expected that if a Christian is guilty of *por-nei'a* and claims to be repentant, that one should be willing to confess to the innocent mate and continue in the marriage if the innocent mate is willing to do so. (*w*73 6/1 351-2) An exception might be made if the guilty Witness claims that there is a grave danger because the unbelieving mate is known as a violent person. Otherwise, confession would be required as an evidence of repentance.

What if the adulterous one whose case is being handled refuses to confess the *por-nei'a* to an innocent mate who is a member of the congregation and so is disfellowshipped? Without going into details, the **judicial committee should inform the believing innocent mate** that he or she has a Scriptural basis for divorce and freedom to remarry.—*g*74 11/8 27.

If **a divorce is obtained on a legal ground other than *por-nei'a***, though that is the real reason, the evidence establishing the adultery should be presented to the congregation elders at or before the time the divorce action is taken.

Where Scriptural grounds (*por-nei'a*) exist and the innocent mate desires to get a legal divorce, it would normally be expected that consideration would be given to obtaining a divorce in the country or state where that mate lives. This would especially be the case if the requirements for divorce locally are not excessively difficult. There should not be a serious question that one's current country or state of residence would recognize the validity of a divorce obtained elsewhere. However, if a brother or sister with Scriptural grounds **obtains a legal divorce in another country or state**, such a divorce will be recognized by the Christian congregation if the legal divorce obtained elsewhere is recognized as valid in the country where it was issued, permitting remarriage. The couple could remarry in a country recognizing this legal divorce. If they return to live in their

own country or state but the government there does not recognize the legal divorce obtained in the other country or state and on this basis will not give legal status to the new marriage, the Christian congregation would, nevertheless, recognize the legal divorce and remarriage that occurred in another country or state. The couple would be responsible for any problems that might result because the marriage does not have legal status in their country or state. The brother and sister in this situation qualify for special privileges if otherwise irreprehensible. If the one who got a divorce in another country or state returns unmarried to his own country or state, he should meet the legal requirements for remarriage before dating or remarrying unless it is established that such legal requirements are unreasonably demanding (as discussed below).

In countries where **obtaining a civil divorce is not possible or** conditions make it very **difficult** to obtain a divorce within a reasonable length of time, concessions to dedicated members of the congregation can be made. (w77 3/15 185) Unusual situations should always be reviewed with the branch office. Using the following as guidelines after consultation with the branch office, the elders may allow the innocent mate to enter a relationship provided (1) *porneia* by the former mate is clearly established, (2) no reconciliation is desired by the innocent mate, (3) a minimum of one year has elapsed since divorce papers were filed, where that is possible, (4) the divorce litigation, where pos-

sible, continues to be pursued in the courts, (5) the two persons sign a Declaration Pledging Faithfulness to each other, and (6) the two persons agree to get legally married if a divorce is granted by the courts or if the legal mate dies. Any inconvenience or complications stemming from this arrangement must be borne by the two persons signing the Declaration. If otherwise qualified, those living in this arrangement qualify for special privileges.—w87 2/15 31.

If an interested person is legally married but because of living in a land where divorce is not permitted later enters a **consensual arrangement with another person before learning the truth**, the interested person is expected to make all reasonable efforts to clear up the marital situation before his baptism. If the interested person decides to remain with his consensual mate, he might decide to go to another country to get a divorce from the legal mate if that can be done. If that is not reasonably possible, he should consider taking all legal steps permitted by local law to terminate the legal marriage that exists, such as by getting a legal separation or an annulment, and to legalize the relationship in which the truth found him. However, in situations **where no reasonable legal steps are available** for obtaining an annulment or a legal separation, the congregation, after consultation with the branch office, may accept a written Declaration Pledging Faithfulness to the consensual mate. There should also be a written agreement to get legally married if that be-

comes possible, as, for example, upon the death of the estranged legal mate. If the law on divorce changes in his country, the congregation should require that he comply. (*w*85 11/1 31) A man living in this situation may be recommended to be a ministerial servant or an elder if he is otherwise qualified. For details on the use of the Declaration Pledging Faithfulness and on the handling of matters in lands where divorce is impossible, see *w*87 2/15 31 and *w*77 3/15 182-5; see also MARRIAGE.

According to the law of certain states in the United States, an **interlocutory decree** is imposed by the divorce court. This means that although the couple are divorced, neither party is free to remarry for the period stated in the court order or in the governing statute. As long as this interlocutory decree is in effect, the two parties continue to be husband and wife. Only when the interlocutory decree has expired are they legally free. If there was Scriptural validity to the divorce, they are also then in a Scriptural position to date as single persons. The local law, which may vary in different places, should be carefully considered.—*w*68 4/15 255-6.

**A legally divorced couple should not have sexual relations with each other**, for this amounts to fornication. It brings reproach upon the congregation and is a basis for disfellowshipping. They should remarry legally before resuming sexual relations. If the couple has sexual relations with each other outside legal marriage, this does not provide grounds for either of

them to marry someone else, since a third party was not involved. (Heb. 13:4; *w*82 9/1 31) If a legal separation but not a divorce is involved, the terms of the separation should be examined, and the dedicated person or persons ought to be advised to live in accord with the agreement, though perhaps working toward reconciliation.—1 Cor. 7:10, 11.

If a marriage mate (whether a believer or an unbeliever) takes steps to get a legal divorce on unscriptural grounds, the other mate may choose to “let him depart,” while making it known to the elders that he or she prefers that they remain married and that the departing one is not being rejected.—1 Cor. 7:12-16.

In some places, the one contesting a divorce may be able to **sign documents** that stipulate provisions for custody and financial support without indicating that he or she agrees with the divorce action. If the innocent mate is being divorced by the adulterous mate, the innocent mate still Scripturally controls whether forgiveness is extended and thus whether the marriage is still valid. Of course, if the mate not seeking the divorce action signs documents that specify that he agrees with the divorce decree, assenting to it, and if the one pursuing the divorce later commits adultery, he could properly view the innocent mate’s previous assent to the legal divorce as rejecting him. In that case, the adultery introduces the Scriptural basis for viewing the marriage as ended. Hence, care should be exercised as to what the defending mate agrees to in

signing papers relating to the divorce action, such as by clarifying his position in court.—*w00* 12/15 28-9; *w88* 11/1 26-30; *w86* 11/1 26-31.

Great caution should be exercised in cases where two individuals seem to have **conspired to put away their mates and then marry each other**. As an example, two dedicated individuals might confess to immorality with each other, be divorced by their mates, be disfellowshipped, marry each other, and in a short time request reinstatement. It would take considerable time before any consideration should be given to such a request. It might take years for such persons to give convincing evidence of repentance, especially in cases where there is definite evidence of deceit or collusion. (*w83* 3/15 29; *w79* 11/15 31-2; *w76* 12/1 728) Their course was certainly very reprehensible, and the judicial committee should be thoroughly satisfied with the genuineness of the repentance claimed. The committee should exercise good judgment and take into account the law of God and the welfare of the congregation. In such a case as this, the individuals are legally married and will not be asked to separate. (*g99* 4/22 9-12; *w83* 12/15 27-9; *w83* 3/15 27-31; *w71* 5/15 309-10) Even after reinstatement, it would take many years, if ever, before the elders could recommend either of them for special privileges in the congregation.—Prov. 6: 32, 33.

Marriage is made binding, not by sexual relations, but by what is done by the couple's entering into a legal mari-

tal relationship. (Signing the Declaration Pledging Faithfulness [where necessary and permitted] accomplishes a similar purpose.) Thus, a couple that entered into a valid marriage would have no basis for dissolving the marriage even if, for whatever reason, they had **no sexual relations**. Neither **insanity** nor **impotence** is a Scriptural ground for divorce. **Annulment** of a marriage does not free one Scripturally to remarry unless adultery or fornication is established. However, if young persons not legally entitled to marry lie about their ages and get married without parental consent, their parents could annul a legally voidable marriage as soon as they found out about it. The parents would need to consider carefully what would be best for their children under the circumstances. If the marriage is annulled, the situation would be handled by a congregation judicial committee as a case of lying and fornication.—*w99* 8/15 30-1.

In a country where the native custom is that a second wife who leaves or is put away must repay the **bride-price** to her former husband in order to make the divorce complete, the congregation will not require that baptism be delayed until she has finished the payment. Scripturally she has left off living in adultery and so is in a position to be baptized. The bride-price does not determine the matter.

Courting or **dating when one party is not Scripturally and legally free** to marry is wrong. (*w94* 2/15 22-5; *w80* 8/1 30-1) Such con-

duct, if persisted in, can lead not only to the offending ones' being denied special privileges but also to their receiving further discipline. (Heb. 13:4) Firm Scriptural counsel should be given first. If the initial warning counsel is ignored, continue reproofing such ones with severity. (Titus 1:10-13) In the event that they do not respond, the elders may have to give a talk that clearly identifies the wrong course so that members of the congregation may 'mark' those who continue to offend in this way. (2 Thess. 3:14, 15; *w99* 7/15 29-31; *w94* 2/15 22-5; *w82* 2/1 31; *w80* 8/1 30-1) Their wrong course could lead to uncleanness (*a-kathar-si'a*); loose, brazen conduct (*a-sel'gei-a*); or fornication (*por-nei'a*, such as entering an adulterous union). If the wrongdoing escalates to the point where it has become shocking and repeated efforts to help adjust the wrongdoers' attitude and conduct have been ignored, it is appropriate for a judicial committee to meet with them to determine if disfellowshipping action is warranted.—Prov. 29:1; Matt. 5:32; Gal. 5:19, 21; *w08* 5/15 27; *w06* 7/15 29-31; *w73* 9/15 574-6.

Regarding the qualifications to be met by those recommended as elders and ministerial servants, adhere to what is set out at 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-3. Additional guiding comments can be found in *w90* 9/1 23-8; *w83* 9/1 16-26; *w78* 12/1 16-25; and *w73* 8/1 469-74.

When a brother is recommended for appointment as an elder or a ministerial servant, there may be cases where **none of his minor children are in the truth** but he seems otherwise to qualify as an elder. There may be factors bearing on his situation, such as his coming into the truth after his children were in their late teens or his efforts to teach them the truth were greatly undermined by an unbelieving wife. The local body of elders should take into consideration what he is doing, or trying to do, and the feeling the congregation in general has toward him as a family man and as to his suitability to counsel others about rearing children in the truth. Where there is any question or doubt as to a brother's qualifications, the elders should have in mind the principle at 1 Timothy 5:22.—*w84* 5/15 30-1; *w83* 9/1 23-6; *w78* 2/1 31-2; *w72* 2/15 126-7.

If a **brother is away from home** to do secular work for an extended period, this could be a basis for questioning his qualifications to serve as an elder or a ministerial servant. The likelihood is that the family would suffer because of not having him home to care for the family spiritually. Those taking the lead in the congregation are expected to

set a proper example and to have reasonable success in 'presiding over their households in a fine manner.' (1 Tim. 3: 4, 5, 12; Eph. 6:4) Similarly, a brother's qualifications might be questioned if he **arranged for (or condoned) his wife's being away** from home for an extended period to earn money. Especially would this be so if her absence was spiritually damaging to herself and the family. The circumstances in each case would need to be considered.

If an elder or a ministerial servant **arranged for (or approved of) his child's receiving schooling away from home** and from family supervision, this could reflect poorly upon his qualifications to serve. The father should be helped to see the dangers to which such an arrangement exposes the child. (Prov. 29:15) The circumstances would need to be considered. The important determination is whether the child's needs, spiritually and otherwise, are cared for sufficiently.—*w96* 10/1 30-1; *w82* 7/15 14-15.—See also FAMILY AFFAIRS and SCHOOLS, SECULAR EDUCATION.

If it comes to light or a brother confesses that he has **committed a disfellowshipping offense** within the past few years while serving as an elder or a ministerial servant, he is disqualified for serving as such, not being "free from accusation." (1 Tim. 3:2, 10; Titus 1:6, 7) Depending on the circumstances, the situation may also need to be handled by a judicial committee. But if the immorality or other serious wrongdoing occurred more than a few years ago and



he is genuinely repentant, recognizing that he should have come forward immediately when he sinned, good counsel by elders may be sufficient. That is especially so if he confessed to his sin, seeking help with his guilty conscience. Likewise, the elders would decide whether he should step down from his position of service. If he has been serving faithfully for many years, has evidence of God's blessing, and has the respect of the congregation, he might not have to relinquish his position of service. However, if the sin occurred before he was appointed as an elder or a ministerial servant, the elders will need to take into consideration the fact that he should have mentioned this possible impediment to his being qualified when elders interviewed him just prior to announcing his appointment. Moreover, the nature of the sin may reflect greatly on his qualifications to serve. For example, the sin may involve past child abuse, and this would likely disqualify him for many years.—*w97* 1/1 26-9; *w77* 11/15 697-8.

When lesser problems are involved that reflect upon the qualifications of a brother, encourage the local elders to consider whether the situation causes the individual to come under accusation and whether it reduces his effectiveness as an elder or a ministerial servant. (Titus 1:7) Perhaps a few people will criticize, which may not always be avoidable, but do the members of the congregation in general have respect for him and confidence in him? Do they look to him as an 'example to the flock'?

(1 Pet. 5:3) It is not necessary to seek a specific ruling to determine what should be done in each case. Consider the actual situation, including the brother's attitude and the effect on the congregation if he was to continue serving as an elder or a ministerial servant.

**Rebaptism** of an elder or a ministerial servant does not necessarily require that he step down. Much depends upon the circumstances, including the reason he felt the need to be rebaptized. If it is necessary for him to step down from being an elder or a ministerial servant, a year should pass after rebaptism before he is again recommended for appointment.—*w70* 5/15 308; *w64* 2/15 126.

If an elder is **imprisoned** for his beliefs, he continues to be an elder, though viewed as temporarily incapacitated and not functioning in connection with congregational matters.

If an elder or a ministerial servant begins **dating an unbeliever**, this would call into question his qualifications. He should be given appropriate counsel so that he understands why his course is not in harmony with the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14) If he does not respond, the body of elders should recommend his removal. Thereafter, if repeated counsel is ignored, 'marking' may be in order.—2 Thess. 3:14; *w99* 7/15 29-31; *od* 150-1; *w82* 3/15 31.

Elders or ministerial servants who are no longer able regularly to take care of any or all of their assigned duties because of **advancing age** or

deteriorating physical **health** need not be deleted for those reasons. However, should such a one choose to resign, his expressed desire can be honored by the local elders, and a recommendation for his deletion may be submitted.

See also CLOTHING AND GROOMING.

While an individual's employment can affect his standing in the congregation or his qualifications for service privileges, **it is not for us to tell anyone what kind of work he may or may not do.** But we can and should direct his attention to the Scriptures and encourage him to reason on his own situation in relation to what the Bible says. If certain work is plainly in conflict with clearly stated Bible requirements, this should be pointed out. If what he is doing or has in mind to do might be affected by a consideration of some Bible principles to which he should give thought, this too should be stated. We can also mention that the local elders may often be of assistance. They may help to isolate vital details and to evaluate what the local reaction to the employment might be. And through discussion they can help the individual to examine the work in the light of the Scriptures.

In handling and commenting on employment questions, do not approach these as if there were an arbitrary rule covering each one. Usually each situation has its own distinctive features that must be dealt with individually. There are, though, some **basic factors**, or aspects, that can be reviewed and that can help in evaluating various employment situations. We will first present these, along with clarifying comments, and then we will consider each one through examples that may help to show how to use and weigh these factors.—*w99* 4/15 28-30; *w82* 7/15 26.

Often it is helpful to begin by thinking about the first two of the following seven questions:

**1. Would doing this particular work in itself constitute an act condemned in the Bible?** For example, God's Word condemns the making of idols and stealing; thus, employment requiring a Christian to do such things would be wrong. (Ex. 20:4; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 4:28) Other activities, such as gambling (See **GAMBLING.**), misusing blood, and promoting addiction to harmful drugs, clearly violate Bible principles. (Isa. 65:11; Acts 15:29; 2 Cor. 7:1; Col. 3:5) An unbaptized person engaged in such work would not be in a position to get baptized, and a Witness who takes up such work might have to be disfellowshipped or viewed as having disassociated himself, depending upon the offense. He should make an adjustment as soon as possible so that his work is in line with the Scriptures. When the principle at Isaiah 2:4 is being violated and the baptized individual unrepentantly continues in this course, he cannot continue to be a part of the neutral Christian congregation.

**2. If a person is not directly doing something condemned in the Bible, is what he is doing so closely linked with the unscriptural practice that he unquestionably becomes an accomplice in or a promoter of the wrong practice?** As with those described in point 1 above, a person in this situation is not in a position to be baptized or to be in good standing in the congregation unless

changes are made. A basic need, then, is to see first just **what kind of work the person is actually doing.** (Rev. 13:16) Usually employment questions are not clear-cut. Thus, it is often helpful to consider some of the **additional factors** enumerated below that may have a bearing on the overall picture of an individual's employment. Though in most cases any one of these additional factors may not of itself be decisive in determining how to view a situation, it is advisable to consider to what extent these factors may be involved. They may have a bearing, for example, on whether one is in a position to be an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer.

**3. Does performing the work merely provide a common human service that of itself is not Scripturally condemned?** God provides things needed for human life that are used by all people, good and bad alike. (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17) We as Christians have no reason to discriminate against other humans, even those in the world whose life-style or religious beliefs are out of harmony with the Scriptures. —Rom. 13:8-10.

**4. To what extent does the individual have authority over what is done?** See the following section, EXAMPLES AND DISCUSSION.

**5. To what degree is the individual involved?** Is the undesirable activity or contact a rare thing, or is it a regular, major aspect of his work? There is no set percentage to look for. But calling a brother's attention to this aspect of

things and appealing to his Christian conscience will help him get a clearer picture of his situation.—2 Cor. 1:12; 4:2.

**6. What is the source of one's pay or the location of the employment or work to be done?** These aspects of themselves do not necessarily rule out a Christian's doing certain questionable work, but they ought to be considered when analyzing such questions as: What is the individual actually doing? Where? And what might be the effect of it on him or on others?

**7. What is the overall effect—on the person himself and on others—of his being employed in this way or of his doing the work in question?** This is an important aspect to consider even in connection with work that of itself is not condemned in the Bible. Is he stumbling others or wounding the consciences of those for whom Christ died? (1 Cor. 8:11-13) Does he himself have a troubled conscience or serious doubts, perhaps feeling condemned before God for doing the work? Does performing such work result in loss of respect, so that others no longer look on him as one who is "irreprehensible" or "free from accusation"?—1 Tim. 3:2, 10; Rom. 14:1-5; Titus 1:7; Heb. 13:18.

#### EXAMPLES AND DISCUSSION:

**1. Work specifically condemned in the Bible:**

**EXAMPLE:** A woman earns her living by purchasing lottery tickets and selling them as a street vendor.

Comments: Her entire employment is in conflict with Bible principles that condemn gambling. To be a member of the congregation, she would have to take up work not in conflict with the Scriptures.

**EXAMPLE:** A man works in a civilian factory regularly making equipment that supports and facilitates activities not in harmony with Isaiah 2:4.

Comments: Whether he is self-employed or employed by a commercial firm, his entire work involves regularly making nonneutral products. He is not in a position to remain a member of the Christian congregation, which acts in harmony with Isaiah 2:4. If he persists in doing this work despite counsel, he would be viewed as having disassociated himself.

**2. Work that is not in itself unscriptural but that closely links one with a wrong practice or makes one a promoter of it:**

**EXAMPLE:** A brother learns that a small portion of the equipment he normally makes on a line producing commercial aircraft will now be diverted to a use out of harmony with Isaiah 2:4.

Comments: If only a small portion of what he produces will now be diverted to nonneutral purposes, an adjustment in employment would not be required, although his own conscience might motivate him to seek work that does not require that he do anything objectionable. He might continue to enjoy special privileges as long as he has the

respect of the congregation. However, if he agreed to do an increasing amount of the nonneutral work, though most of what he produced was still not objectionable, he might get to the point where he would be disqualified for special privileges. (*w64* 11/15 703) Moreover, if what he produced that was for a purpose contrary to Isaiah 2:4 increased to the point that it was evident that he was significantly contributing by his intellect and skills to nonneutral activities, he could not remain a part of the neutral congregation unless he made adjustments in his type of employment. (*w67* 6/15 369) Determinations in such situations are not made according to a percentage formula, as if one half or more of the work's being unscriptural would require an adjustment and less than one half would require no adjustment. Each person should be encouraged to make decisions in life that do not suggest that he is seeing how close to the line of unacceptability he can walk.

**EXAMPLE:** In a situation similar to the preceding example, a brother works for a construction company. He *occasionally* performs assignments to work on churches.

Comments: This would not disqualify him from having special privileges unless this became a cause for stumbling to others in the congregation. However, if he agreed to *increased* work assignments of construction on churches, he would not qualify for special privileges. If his work assignments involved *frequent* work on churches, this could lead to disfellowshipping unless

adjustments were made.—*w99 4/15 28-30; w64 11/15 703.*

**EXAMPLE:** A brother works for a company that has increasingly taken on nonneutral contracts to the point that now the products manufactured are almost exclusively for purposes out of harmony with Isaiah 2:4.

Comments: While the brother may have been able to arrange in the past to do no more than incidental objectionable work, the overall production of the company is now almost totally for purposes out of harmony with Isaiah 2:4. This is the way the company has come to be identified in the community. While all factors need to be considered, an adjustment will likely need to be made in his employment if the brother is to continue to be a member of the Christian congregation.—*w99 4/15 29; w67 6/15 369.*

**EXAMPLE:** A woman works as a receptionist at an abortion clinic. She does not share directly in abortion procedures. She desires to be baptized.

Comments: While her job assignment does not require her to help with the abortion procedures directly, she is nevertheless regularly supporting the operation of a clinic that exists to perform abortions, which take the lives of unborn children. She does not qualify for baptism unless she discontinues such employment. Similarly, if the circumstances of a brother employed elsewhere change so that he is regularly required to support an organization that arranges for and performs abortions, he

will have to terminate such employment in order to remain in the Christian congregation. In contrast, one employed in a hospital as a nurse or a health attendant may find that he can occasionally provide care to a patient who is there for an abortion. The Witness may view this as an incidental part of his duties of looking after the general needs of the sick in a hospital.

**EXAMPLE:** Two baptized women work as maids on a military base. One is employed by a family in their home. The other is employed to clean the barracks.

Comments: The first woman concludes that she can accept employment by the family and not be in conflict with Isaiah 2:4. She reasons that despite the location of her work and the fact that the breadwinner of the family is involved in work out of harmony with Isaiah 2:4, she is providing a common service for individuals in a home and is not employed directly by an organization that is in conflict with the Scriptures. (2 Ki. 5:2, 3, 15-19; Phil. 4:22) She may continue to be a member of the congregation, but if she seeks the privilege of pioneer service, consideration may have to be given to how her employment is affecting others and whether she is viewed as a good example.

The other woman, by her regular work, is performing a needed service that facilitates the overall objectives of an organization whose purpose is out of harmony with Isaiah 2:4. In addition, she is paid by that organization,

works on its property, and is regularly doing work that supports that organization and its objectives. She is in conflict with Isaiah 2:4. Unless she makes a change in her employment, she will be viewed as having dissociated herself.

**EXAMPLE:** Working at a supermarket checkout counter, a Christian sister occasionally handles cigarettes but feels that she can do this, since she is not personally promoting tobacco and her contact with it is only an incidental part of her work. However, she is then asked to work in the same store at a counter where only tobacco products are sold.

Comments: Accepting the work at the tobacco counter would identify her directly and entirely with the sale of tobacco and the promotion of its use, a practice understood to be inconsistent with Bible principles. If a member of the congregation accepts such work, the elders should try to help that one. (Gal. 6:1) If in a reasonable time no change is made, the person would have to be disfellowshipped from the congregation.—See also TOBACCO (AND DRUGS).

### **3. Providing a human service:**

**EXAMPLE:** A man operates a food stand (or a store) and occasionally has customers who are clergymen or military personnel. Sometimes they buy things for themselves but at other times for an organization that is in conflict with the Scriptures. He desires to be baptized.

Comments: The man is not specifically soliciting business from an organi-

zation that is out of harmony with God's Word. He is selling products in a market that is open to everyone, and the items sold are not in themselves designed for unchristian use. Even if a customer bought some food or other goods on behalf of an organization that is in conflict with the Bible, the businessman is not exclusively or even primarily doing business with that organization; he is providing a human service for anyone.

**EXAMPLE:** A brother who owns a plumbing business receives a call to do emergency repairs on a broken water pipe in the basement of a local church. Some time later, a representative of the church contacts another brother, a builder, about putting a new roof and addition on the church.

Comments: The first brother concludes that because he is providing a human service, his conscience permits him to care for the emergency situation on a onetime basis. Nevertheless, in doing this emergency repair, he should advise the church to seek another plumber for any regular work. Perhaps few would be critical of his helping out during such an emergency or would view him as reprehensible.

The second brother realizes that even though in his business he has put roofs and additions on many homes and businesses, for him to contract to do so in the case of the church would be lending considerable support to the advancement of false worship. It would not be just an incidental contact, such as

a postman's delivering mail or someone's act of humanitarian aid in a desperate situation. It would be a major undertaking that would involve extended work on a building used exclusively for false worship, aiding in the perpetuation of Babylon the Great. (2 Cor. 6:14-18) A true Christian could not do that.—*w99* 4/15 28-30; *w67* 6/15 369.

#### **4. Extent of authority or control over what is done:**

**EXAMPLE:** A brother employed at a grocery store is asked to unpack cartons and stock the shelves. One shipment includes cards for a religious holiday. Another brother in town owns a small store (or manages it, with control over what is stocked). He wonders about selling holiday cards.

Comments: The first brother does not control the store or its line of merchandise. He may feel that with a clear conscience, he can put on the shelves the merchandise ordered by the owner or manager, this being a minor part of the brother's overall work. The decision is a personal one that would probably not affect his standing in the congregation.

The brother who owns a store is in control of what is stocked. For him to purchase, sell, or advertise items known to be used just for a false religious holiday would be wrong. If he did so and was unrepentant, he would be disfellowshipped for promoting apostasy.—2 Cor. 6:14-18.

**EXAMPLE:** A self-employed sister sells a company's line of cosmetics, using advertising catalogs provided by the company. Around Christmastime, there are special holiday items in catalogs decorated with holiday designs.

Comments: Does the sister have control over the format and contents of the catalogs? Evidently not. If her conscience permitted her to do so, she might let potential customers look at the catalogs (containing both regular and holiday items), without her personally encouraging holiday purchases or the Christmas spirit. She might also write up orders for what the customers wanted. Even though she did not control the contents of the catalogs, if the matter became a cause of disturbance in the congregation, the elders should reason with her, using 1 Corinthians 10:29, 31-33 and 2 Corinthians 4:2. How others in the congregation react could affect whether she qualifies for special privileges.

#### **5. Degree of involvement:**

**EXAMPLE:** A sister works in a clothing factory where garments of all sorts are produced, including some of a design specifically to be used by clergymen. Later the product line is changed, so that the factory makes such religious garments almost exclusively.

Comments: Working for a commercial concern, the sister does not control the type of garments made. In the past, religious clothing may have been a minor part of the total output, and she may have felt conscientiously able to work there without viewing herself or



being viewed by others as a promoter of false religion. When the business changed and began producing religious clothing almost exclusively, it was no longer a minor involvement. The elders should speak with her, showing that now the work is linking her extensively with a condemned practice. Her continuing in such work would make her a promoter of false religion, and thus she needs to make changes to remain in the congregation.—Isa. 52:11.

#### **6. Source of one's pay or location of the employment:**

**EXAMPLE:** A man works for the railroad, repairing engines. When the government nationalizes the railroad, his paycheck for doing the same work now comes from the government department that primarily controls activities out of harmony with Isaiah 2:4.

Comments: Though the source of his paycheck has changed, the nature of his work has not. Moreover, the railway equipment is still being used as before to transport passengers and all types of goods, not just items to be used unscripturally. Likely he would not be viewed as promoting anything out of harmony with the Scriptures. His work would be no bar to his getting baptized or receiving responsibilities in the congregation as long as his work situation does not cause widespread disturbance in the congregation.

#### **7. Overall effect:**

In replying to inquiries, it is often helpful to bring up the matter of how

an individual's decision may spiritually affect both the inquirer and others. Will it impede the progress of those who face serious decisions in bringing their lives into harmony with the Scriptures? Will others be inclined to follow the example set by the individual and make decisions that would put them in conflict with the Bible and might result in their being removed from the congregation? When discussing the use of meat from animals that had been sacrificed to idols but was not thereafter being eaten as something dedicated to an idol, the apostle Paul focused attention on how one's course might affect the consciences of others. That should be considered today too. Will others be emboldened to do something against their conscience and thus be spiritually "ruined"? (1 Cor. 8:11; 10:28-33) We should never leave the impression that if something is not absolutely forbidden, it makes no difference what one does.

Because Christians differ in their viewpoints and consciences, we should **not expect that everyone will reach exactly the same conclusion** on employment questions. Since consciences differ, we want to encourage elders who inquire not to be unduly restrictive in viewing someone whose conscience allows him to accept a type of work that is in a gray area but is not unquestionably contrary to the Bible.—*w77 12/1 714-16.*

What if the nature of someone's work or factors such as where he works or from whom he receives his pay cause **widespread concern in the**

**congregation** and loss of respect for that one's example? That situation can have a bearing on the privileges extended. Those appointed as elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers ought to be exemplary.—1 Cor. 6:3, 4; 1 Tim. 3:2, 7, 10.

If a member of the congregation gets involved in an employment **situation that unquestionably puts him in conflict with the Bible**, the elders should attempt to assist him to reevaluate his work in the light of the Scriptures and to make the changes that are necessary for his employment to be once again in harmony with God's Word. (Gal. 6:1) A period of time up to six months might be allowed for him to make the needed adjustments. In those cases in which that is not done, the person can be disfellowshipped or noted as someone who has disassociated himself from God's neutral congregation. The handling of the matter by the congregation is dependent on the type of activity in which he has become involved.

Doing secular work requiring the carrying of a **firearm** exposes one to the possibility of becoming bloodguilty if called upon to use such a weapon. A brother would not be regarded as exemplary if he was to continue with such employment after being given reasonable time (perhaps three months) to find other work. While he could get baptized, share in preaching the good news, and enroll in the Theocratic Ministry School, he would not be given any special privileges in the congregation.—1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:5, 6; *w83* 7/15 25-6.

Selling of firearms or being employed in a store where firearms are sold.—See FIREARMS.

Questions relating to employment involving tobacco are treated under TOBACCO (AND DRUGS).

In handling correspondence, keep in mind that wives are to be in subjection to their husbands even if the husbands are not dedicated Christians. (Eph. 5:22, 23; 1 Pet. 3:1) Christian wives, however, choose to obey God as Ruler if there is a conflict between the husbands' demands and the direct commands of God. (Acts 5:29) Children are to be obedient to their parents. (Col. 3:20) The parents, particularly the father as the head of the house, make final decisions on matters affecting the children, whether the parents are believers or not. (Prov. 23:22; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 6:1-4) The instructions to children to obey their parents do not leave God out. His requirements are not to be ignored.

Husbands ought to exercise loving headship, but their failure to do so does not relieve other members of the family of their own responsibilities. If a **husband gives in to fits of anger and violence**, even beating his wife, she will have to decide whether to remain with him. His pattern of violence could lead to disfellowshipping if he is baptized, as well as to court action for her protection.—*g93* 2/8 13-14; *w88* 11/1 22; *w75* 5/1 286-8.

For practical suggestions on **what single parents can successfully do to 'bring up children** in the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah' (Eph. 6:4) while coping with life's problems, see *g02* 10/8 3-12; *g80* 10/22 25-8; and *w80* 9/15 15-20.

Reasonableness is often the key to promoting peace and to **avoiding mar-**

**ital conflicts in divided households.** The Bible counsels against separating from the unbelieving mate if that one "is agreeable to dwelling with" the believing mate. (1 Cor. 7:12-14) If an unbelieving husband tries to prevent his Christian wife from serving Jehovah, she may endeavor to reason with him, tactfully pointing out that she recognizes his religious freedom and that she should logically receive similar treatment. Nevertheless, relative subjection to her unbelieving husband must be balanced with her primary obligation to obey God.—Acts 5:29; 1 Cor. 11:3; *w02* 8/15 30-1; *fy* 129-32; *w95* 6/1 26-9; *w90* 8/15 20-3; *w88* 11/1 24-5; *w75* 9/15 575-6; *w71* 4/1 201-4, 207-13.

If the **unbelieving husband refuses to allow his believing wife to take the children to Christian meetings**, she will have to make a personal decision as to how she reconciles Acts 5:29 (to obey God rather than men) with 1 Corinthians 11:3 (the head of the woman is the man). Despite opposition from her husband, by using discernment she will likely find many ways to help the children spiritually. Helpful counsel can be found in *w80* 9/15 15-20; *w75* 7/15 437-8; and *w71* 4/1 207-13.

**If the husband is the believer**, he has the Scriptural obligation as the head of the household to raise his children as Christians. So he should study the Bible with them, take them to the meetings, and teach them in the field ministry. (Eph. 6:4) Naturally, he should be kind, loving, and reasonable in dealing with his unbelieving wife.—*fy* 133-4;

*w95 6/1 26-9; w90 8/15 20-3; w88 11/1 24-5; w71 4/1 204-6.*

Parents who arrange for (or approve of) schooling for a minor child that requires the child to be away from the family for an extended period may not qualify for special privileges in the congregation. Similarly, if a husband arranges for or approves of his wife's doing secular work away from home for an extended period, this can affect his qualifications to care for special privileges.—See ELDERS AND MINISTERIAL SERVANTS.

An unbelieving wife may **insist on taking the children with her to church**, though the believing father regularly takes them with him to Christian meetings. If the children are not of an age to decide which they prefer and there is a danger of the family's breaking up through divorce, the father would not automatically be disqualified for responsibilities in the congregation if he allowed the children to accompany his wife at her insistence, though he would do all he could in other ways to instill the truth in them. (*w71 4/1 204-6*) If she goes further by threatening divorce and by making **demands that he not take the children to Christian meetings** or in the ministry for training, he should reason with her in line with Bible principles. Because the law of the land grants her freedom of worship, even allowing her to take the children to her own church, it would be reasonable for her to recognize that he has the same rights. If he chooses to ac-

cede to his wife's demands that he not take the children to Christian meetings or in the ministry, he would not qualify for special privileges.—*fy 133-4; w95 6/1 26-9; w90 8/15 20-3; w88 11/1 24-5; w71 4/1 204-6.*

For comments on how a dedicated wife might act if her unbelieving husband requested her to do certain things on a holiday, see HOLIDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES.

**A Christian youth who has unbelieving parents and who is asked to do something in conflict with his Christian conscience** should respectfully discuss the matter with them. If the father, for instance, demands that the youth accompany him to a church service, the Christian youth will have to decide what to do. He might conclude that he could be present out of obedience to his father, though determined not to perform false religious acts or to do things contrary to God's Word. (2 Ki. 5:18, 19; *w70 3/1 155-6*) If punished for conscientiously refraining from doing what displeases God, the child is suffering for righteousness' sake. (1 Pet. 2:19, 20) One who has become a dedicated Christian has an obligation to obey God first of all.—*fy 135; w95 6/1 28-9; w60 12/1 735-6.*

If a young one is **forbidden by unbelieving parents to attend meetings or to study** with Jehovah's Witnesses, the youth must decide what to do. If he comes to meetings, the congregation will not bar him. And if he asks to study the Bible, it may be that

some Witness will feel able to render help.—*w73* 11/1 671-2.

If children get involved in wrong conduct, the parents have the responsibility to administer the needed family discipline. (Prov. 13:24; Heb. 12:7-9; *w01* 10/1 13-18) The elders are concerned with **unbaptized minors** associated with the congregation who become involved in serious wrongdoing. If an erring youth is an unbaptized publisher, the elders will decide whether the individual can retain that privilege.—*w88* 11/15 18-20.

In the case of a **baptized** minor who **engages in serious wrongdoing**, such as fornication, a judicial committee should meet with the minor, preferably with the parents present. Depending on the needs of the case, the elders, using God's Word and the publications of Jehovah's organization, may be able to reprove and help him, cooperating with the parents' efforts to apply discipline and to provide help. If there is no repentance, disfellowshipping may be decided upon. Whether the minor is baptized or not, if the father is an elder or a ministerial servant, the elders would handle the situation involving the father's position in accord with "Questions From Readers" in the February 1, 1978, issue of *The Watchtower*.—See also WRONGDOING, HANDLING CASES OF.

Regarding custody problems where children are involved, see CHILDREN.

**Care for aged parents:** This is a Scriptural responsibility, and dedicated Christians must personally decide how

care can best be provided. As for care provided by a married daughter, final decisions rest with her husband.—*w94* 8/1 27-30; *g94* 2/8 3-10; *w87* 6/15 24-7; *w87* 6/1 4-18; *w81* 1/1 3-7; *g75* 10/22 27-8; *g75* 5/22 24-6; see also LIVING ACCOMMODATIONS.

**Care for a mentally retarded child:** The parents, particularly the father, must decide whether this can be done at home or must be done elsewhere. If the child is capable of learning, the parents ought to discharge their God-given responsibility to provide instruction.—Deut. 6:4-7; Eph. 6:4; *g00* 5/8 22-4; *g95* 12/8 11-13; *w76* 9/15 575-6; *g75* 6/22 20-3; *w63* 6/15 383-4.

**Child that results either from adultery or from rape of a married woman:** The husband of the married woman bears the responsibility to decide whether the infant will be raised in their home or elsewhere. It shows consideration on his part if he takes into account the wishes of his wife as the mother of the child.

**Child that results either from fornication or from rape of a minor girl:** The father of the single, minor girl (or the mother in a single-parent home where there is no father) bears the responsibility to decide whether the infant will be raised in the home or elsewhere. It shows consideration on his part to consider the minor's valid wishes. He must also decide whether to permit the girl to marry the male who caused the pregnancy. Being pregnant does not require marriage to

the father of the child simply to avoid illegitimacy. A hasty or improper marriage may only make a bad situation worse. Emotional support from individuals in the congregation is sometimes helpful.—Ex. 22:22; Jas. 1:27; g94 10/8 22-4; g90 5/8 25-7; w82 8/15 31, fn.; w56 8/15 511.

Abortion is wrong in cases involving adultery, fornication, or even rape.

**Birth control:** If a Christian married couple decide that they will not have children or that they want to limit the size of their family, that is a personal matter. (g93 2/22 7-9; w73 4/15 255-6) There are numerous birth-control methods. It is not our place to recommend or endorse any of these. If a birth-control method allows conception but interrupts the development of the fertilized ovum, it is actually abortion. Certain methods may have physical side effects that should be considered.—w89 6/15 29; w79 5/15 30-1; w77 8/1 478-80; w75 3/1 158-60; w69 12/15 765-8.

**Sterilization** has become a widely used form of birth control. Unlike other methods of birth control, the present reality is that its effect is permanent sterility for most using it. Thus, Christians should seriously consider the indications from the Bible that Jehovah highly esteems the procreative ability given to humans. If it became publicly known that a brother or a sister has treated lightly God's evaluation of the procreative organs, using sterilization merely for its convenience as a form of birth

control, such a one would not qualify for special privileges in the congregation.—w99 6/15 27-8.

For further information regarding abortion and sterilization, see MEDICAL AND HEALTH TREATMENT.

When inquiries are specifically made as to the propriety of **oral or anal sex within marriage**, reference can be made to the article "Honor Godly Marriage!" in the March 15, 1983, issue of *The Watchtower*. There, perverted sexual practices within marriage are Scripturally explained to be a form of uncleanness. Encourage the Christian couple to handle their intimate affairs so as to leave them with a good conscience. (1 Tim. 1:5, 19) This is not a matter that the elders should feel that they need to inquire into or try to regulate. If husband and wife differ on this matter, which is often the basis of a letter of inquiry, the one who objects to a practice could attempt to reason with his or her mate, asking respect for his or her conscience.—See SEXUAL CONDUCT.

A Christian may decide according to his own conscientious feelings **whether to pay a fine or to submit to imprisonment** when pronounced guilty by a judge or law court for proclaiming the good news or doing work relating to such preaching. A fine may rightly be viewed as a form of punishment, although unjust. Such should not be confused with an effort by an offender to buy his way out of imprisonment. —Acts 24:26, 27; 25:10, 11; Rom. 13:1, 2; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14; *w75* 4/1 223-4.

There may be cases in which the **court orders a certain fine to be paid to a religious or political organization**. In such cases, the fine should be paid to the court, and perhaps the attorney can speak to the judge, if that is advisable, explaining why the fine cannot conscientiously be paid to a religious or political organization.

While people own firearms for various purposes, possessing them creates a potential for bloodguilt. Hence, the Christian needs to weigh carefully and prayerfully whether he would be justified in carrying firearms or having them in his home. Our position regarding guns is becoming well-known as others take notice of our peaceful stand. Their Christian neutrality, including not having weapons in their possession, has often resulted in the deliverance of Jehovah's people from violent and threatening situations.—1 Pet. 3:11; g90 5/22 2-11; w90 5/15 30-1; w85 7/1 23; w84 3/1 13-15; w83 7/15 23-6; g75 9/8 27-8; w68 6/1 345-50; see also SELF-DEFENSE.

If a member of the congregation insists on carrying or **possessing firearms for protection against humans**—equipping himself to become “a smiter”—the elders should counsel him and help him to remedy the situation. Lack of compliance by an individual can result in his not being qualified to have special privileges.—1 Tim. 3:2, 3; Mic. 4:3; Gal. 6:1.

The **keeping of firearms for hunting or protection from wild animals** is a matter for personal decision. (w90 5/15 30-1) Yet, even hunting guns, when easily accessible, can result in tragedy.—g98 9/8 6-7; g95 5/8 29; g65 7/8 3-4.

A person who continues to **carry a firearm in connection with his employment** does not qualify for special privileges in the congregation. Experi-

ence has shown that, besides injury to such an individual's conscience, there is always the danger that he will incur bloodguilt by taking someone's life with the weapon. He also exposes himself to the danger of injury or death as a result of retaliation. (Ps. 51:14) It is best to avoid such dangers by choosing employment where these possibilities do not arise.—w83 7/15 25-6; see also EMPLOYMENT.

When questions arise because a Christian owns a business that stocks and sells guns, encourage the owner to consider whether any negative effects resulting from his sale of certain firearms in the community might recommend some adjustments.—1 Cor. 10:31-33.

What about **arranging for armed security guards**? A Christian doing so would be putting a gun in the hands of a person who might shoot or kill someone to protect property.—w98 12/15 22.



Flags are often used as symbols to represent nations or institutions. True Christians manifest respect for governments, and they likewise respect flags viewed as symbols standing for the governments, but they do not worship flags. **Jehovah's Witnesses do not interfere with what other people do** with regard to flags.—Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1.

Frequently, national flags are the objects of acts of devotion during patriotic ceremonies. Jehovah's Witnesses do **not share in acts of devotion to symbols or idols**, nor do they give worship to humans. Hence, they do not salute or pledge allegiance to **flags**. (Ex. 20:4, 5; Matt. 4:10; 1 John 5:21; *rs* 274-5; *g*71 9/8 13-15; *g*65 6/8 8-12; *w*64 6/15 377-9; *g*63 8/8 16-20) Similarly, they do not join in **anthems** that amount to patriotic prayers or expressions of homage to nations or human institutions.—*w*02 9/15 21-5; *w*87 11/1 22-3; *w*75 4/1 217-8; *w*74 1/15 62-3; *w*64 6/15 379-82.

Sometimes the patriotic act has two aspects, such as **standing and saluting or standing and singing**. In these cases, standing in itself is not usually viewed as the complete act amounting to idolatry, or worship. Where both standing and saluting or standing and singing are involved, the individual conscience of the Christian comes into play. One Christian may feel that out of respect for what is represented, he can conscientiously stand but cannot share by saluting or singing. Another Christian in the same situation may choose to remain seated or to be absent alto-

gether during the ceremony. However, if **full participation** in the ceremony and agreement with it are **indicated merely by standing**, such as when an anthem is being played or when someone representing the group salutes a flag and the audience is expected merely to stand, then standing would indicate total agreement and participation in the patriotic act being performed.—*w*02 9/15 23-4; *w*75 4/1 214-18; *w*74 1/15 62-3; *w*64 6/15 379-80.

If a person in a band or an orchestra participated in **playing a national anthem** in a patriotic ceremony, he would thus be expressing total agreement and making an essential contribution to the patriotic act. A Christian could not do this and remain in good standing in the congregation. In contrast, if music instruction in school required a student to show that he could play a certain anthem, not as part of a ceremony, but merely as a demonstration of musical skill to the instructor, this would be a matter for personal decision.

If individuals are **required by law to own or even to display a national flag** over certain buildings, each one can decide what to do according to his conscience. What is of primary consequence is, not whether an individual possesses a flag, but how he acts toward it, whether he shares in idolatry toward it. If Caesar's law requires displaying a flag at a building such as the Branch Office, an Assembly Hall, a missionary home, or a Kingdom Hall, the Branch Committee or other responsible brothers

involved should make a decision in harmony with their collective conscience.

Sometimes at a government-funded **funeral for a war veteran**, a flag is given to a surviving family member; knowing such to be the practice, a Christian may ahead of time request that this aspect of the funeral be omitted. But if that cannot be done, the Christian may conclude that the flag can be accepted as long as no acts of idolatry are required of him.

At his place of work, a person might be assigned to **raise or lower the flag**, such as in or over a school or other public building. To do so during a flag-salute ceremony would indicate participation in the patriotic activity. But when no patriotic ceremony is involved, the individual must decide what he will do.  
—g77 12/22 27-8; w77 1/15 63-4.

Jehovah's organization provides an **outline for a discourse** that can be used for funerals. As necessary, adjustments can be made in the talk to fit the circumstances.

Decisions as to funerals are basically for the family to make. The congregation can be supportive in various ways. If necessary, the congregation can assist with funeral expenses for a faithful Christian who dies destitute and without relatives capable of caring for the cost.—*w80 3/15 5-7*.

The individual Christian can personally decide whether he can, with a good conscience, **attend a church funeral** of a relative or friend. Since a church funeral is really a religious service, many brothers prefer not to be present when a church service is in progress. Thus they avoid the possibility of giving a wrong impression, stumbling others, or of being in a position where they might be pressured into sharing in a false religious act. Some, though, may feel that they can attend as observers without participating in any religious act.—*w02 5/15 28; w70 3/15 191-2*.

It is not wrong to respect the **wishes of a deceased relative** that his funeral be conducted by a clergyman of false religion, contacting the clergyman and making arrangements with him if necessary. The true Christian, though, should carefully avoid any participation in false religious acts. If an unbelieving relative did not make known his wishes before death and a true Christian is responsible for making funeral arrange-

ments, he would prefer to arrange for a funeral that would be consistent with his beliefs as one of Jehovah's people.

A brother speaking at a funeral should **avoid sharing any funeral service with a clergyman** so as to avoid practicing interfaith. He could, though, give a talk at a different time, thus disassociating himself from the false religious service.—*w98 7/15 20-4; km 3/97 7; km 5/65 4*.

Any brother in good standing, if asked by the family of the deceased, may give a **funeral talk**. He does not have to be an elder or a ministerial servant. If the family desires to use the Kingdom Hall, they should obtain permission from the Congregation Service Committee. If the **deceased is an unbelieving family member**, the person's reputation should be considered.—*km 3/97 7; km 11/89 3; km 5/76 8; km 11/73 8*.

**Disfellowshipped persons:** Christians regard a disfellowshipped person as "a man of the nations," which requires avoiding association with him so long as he is in a disfellowshipped state. (Matt. 18:17) However, a brother might feel that he could give a funeral talk, though not at the Kingdom Hall, for a disfellowshipped person who had been giving evidence of repentance and manifesting a desire to be reinstated. Such a funeral talk would not be publicized in the congregation, but a brother could make a personal decision to give the talk out of consideration for the immediate relatives and others who may

be comforted by the Scriptural thoughts presented.—2 Cor. 1:3, 4; *km* 3/97 7; *w*81 9/15 31.

**Suicides:** It is left to the personal decision of a brother as to whether he will conduct a funeral for someone who seems to have committed **suicide**, just as Christians must personally decide whether to attend such a funeral. (1 Sam. 31:4; 2 Sam. 2:5, 6) The body of elders would decide whether the Kingdom Hall could be used for such a funeral.—*w*02 6/15 30-1; *w*77 6/1 346; *w*75 7/15 447-8.

There is no objection to accepting a **burial provided by the government** for a war veteran or a veteran's family member. Perhaps a request can be made for the military ceremony to be dispensed with. If this is not granted, care must be exercised so as not to engage in acts that would be in violation of one's Christian neutrality. Some may prefer to make other arrangements for a funeral.—1 Cor. 10:29, 31-33.

It is left to the Congregation Service Committee as to whether the body of the deceased will be brought into the local **Kingdom Hall for the funeral** service.—*km* 3/97 7.

For comments on specific **funeral customs** or practices, see cremation (*g*76 8/8 27-8), embalming and wakes (*w*02 3/15 29-31; *w*80 3/15 5-7; *g*77 3/22 12-15), wearing clothing of a certain color (*w*98 7/15 20-4; *w*85 4/15 23-5; *w*80 3/15 5-7; *g*77 3/22 12-15; *g*74 12/8 26-8), use of flowers (*w*91 10/15 30-1; *g*77 3/22 12-15), throwing some dirt on the cof-

fin (*g*78 3/8 15), "sexual cleansing" and other African customs (*w*98 1/15 19-22), property grabbing (*w*98 1/15 20), and planning ahead for a funeral.—*w*98 7/15 20-2.

True Christians properly avoid gambling in its many forms. Isaiah 65:11 warns against those leaving Jehovah so as to 'set in order a table for the god of Good Luck.' By gambling, a person manifests greediness and covetousness, which are condemned in the Scriptures. If a person makes a practice of gambling and after repeated counsel unrepentantly pursues a course of greediness, he can be disfellowshipped from the Christian congregation. (Rom. 13:9, 10; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; *w*80 9/1 29-30; *w*67 6/15 356) Furthermore, the lasting damage that gambling has done to many lives gives true Christians reason to avoid it.—Gal. 5:9; *w*02 11/1 31; *g*02 7/22 6-11; *g*87 9/8 12-15; *g*85 8/8 22-3; *g*82 7/8 25-7; *w*80 9/1 29-30; *g*80 8/8 3-4; *w*72 10/1 593-4; *g*64 3/8 16-19.

Sometimes business establishments give out **prizes** to customers, selecting recipients by drawing names from the list of those who made purchases at the store or who signed up earlier. If no money had to be paid for a "chance" in order to be eligible, participation is not necessarily wrong. (*w*93 6/15 31; *g*64 3/8 19) A person needs, however, to be careful that sharing in such an arrangement does not stir up greed. Also, the language used in advertising the contest may involve elements with which a Christian would prefer not to be identified, for personal reasons or because of the possibility of stumbling others.—Isa. 65:11; Rom. 14:21; *g*75 7/8 28.

Investing in the **stock market** is not in itself gambling, but greed can lead to getting involved in practices that

involve great risk and promote "the love of money."—1 Tim. 6:9, 10; *g*01 6/8 30; *g*00 10/8 25-7; *g*62 2/8 21-3.

Working in gambling establishments.—See EMPLOYMENT.

The principle for Christian women's use of a head covering is found at 1 Corinthians 11:3-16. The following issues of *The Watchtower* discuss circumstances when a head covering should be used: *w02* 7/15 26-7; *w77* 2/15 125-8; *w72* 7/15 445-7; *w64* 4/1 200-211; *w64* 3/15 181-3.

Generally speaking, a sister should wear a head covering (1) when she is praying or teaching in the presence of her husband, even if he is unbaptized or if baptized is unable to speak or is handicapped physically or otherwise rendered mute, (2) when she is praying or teaching in the presence of her minor baptized son, and (3) when she is substituting for a brother in directing a meeting arranged by the congregation.—*km* 9/01 3; *rs* 434; *od* 73.

Regarding a head covering when a sister interprets into **sign language** at a meeting, see *The Watchtower* of November 15, 2009, pages 12-13.

A sister would not need to cover her head (1) when conducting a Bible study where no baptized male is present, even though an unbaptized male is being taught or is present; (2) when translating what a speaker says at a congregation meeting for the benefit of those who use another spoken language (*w77* 6/15 383); (3) when praying before going out in field service with several sisters whom she has invited to go with her (this does not apply at a meeting for service arranged by the congregation); (4) when speaking with people in the house-to-house ministry while ac-

companied by her husband or another brother; (5) when initiating a home Bible study while witnessing from house to house or making a return visit with her husband or another brother.

If a sister is unsure whether certain circumstances require that she wear a head covering, her conscience may move her to put on a head covering.—1 Tim. 1:5, 19.

There is no need for others to judge whether a head covering worn by a sister is sufficiently substantial as long as it is appropriate and is recognized as a head covering. Respect for the principle of headship is the important thing. Let the wearer bear the responsibility for deciding what kind of head covering to use. A married woman should seek and accept guidance on this from her baptized husband.

There is no Scriptural requirement that a brother have his head uncovered when praying alone or listening to a prayer.—*w77* 2/15 127-8.

Jehovah's people are commanded to celebrate one anniversary, the Lord's Evening Meal. Various national holidays are celebrated throughout the world, and many of them involve patriotism, nationalism, or false religion. Jesus pointed out the need to keep separate from the practices of this world that could lead one to compromise Christian neutrality or to get involved in some form of idolatry. (*ed* 14-25; *g69* 5/8 6) True Christians today are not preoccupied with the roots and possible ancient religious connections of every practice or custom, but neither are they inclined to ignore pointed indications that exist in God's Word.—*g00* 1/8 26-7; *g76* 12/22 12-15; *w68* 9/15 570-4.

**False religious holidays**, such as Christmas (*w00* 12/15 3-7; *w97* 12/15 3-7; *g81* 12/22 16-17), Easter (*w96* 4/1 3-5; *g86* 3/22 5-8), and Halloween (*g01* 10/8 3-10; *g81* 10/22 16), all have pagan roots and are not shared in by true Christians.—*g93* 11/22 11-14.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate **birthdays**. The Bible does not direct that we celebrate the anniversary of Jesus' birth or that of anyone else. God's Word contains no record that any of God's faithful servants celebrated birthdays. Numerous reference works reveal the superstitious and religious roots of birthday celebrations. But more important, these celebrations are presented in an unfavorable light in the Bible. The only birthday celebrations of Biblical record are those of pagans and are linked to instances of cruelty. (*Gen.* 40:20-23; *Matt.* 14:6-10) Hence, sincere

Christians do not celebrate the date of their birth.—*w98* 10/15 30-1; *w94* 7/15 25; *w92* 9/1 30-1; *g81* 12/22 29; *w80* 7/15 30-1.

For handling a situation where a Witness celebrates his birthday, see DISFELLOWSHIPPING.

Our publications have commented on the following holidays: **New Year's Day** (*g02* 1/8 20-1; *g86* 12/22 20-1; *w74* 1/1 32); **Thanksgiving Day** and harvest-day festivals (*w97* 9/15 8-9; *g76* 11/22 9-13); **Father's Day, Mother's Day**, and **Valentine's Day** (*g74* 2/8 27-8); carnival celebrations (*g96* 6/8 14-15); and **Hanukkah**.—*g90* 12/8 11-13.

While Christians do not turn every "anniversary" into a special day or have a party to commemorate it, their annually remembering on a personal basis a certain special event in their life is not objectionable. For example, a married couple may wish to note their **wedding anniversary**, taking time to reflect on the joyfulness of that event and on their resolve to work for success as a couple.—*w98* 10/15 30-1; *w71* 12/1 735-6.

A dedicated **Christian wife married to an unbeliever** must personally decide where she will go and what she will do in company with her husband. For example, he may insist that on a **religious holiday**, she accompany him for a meal at the home of a relative who views the meal as part of the religious festivities. Or he may require her to cook a meal in their home when he invites guests for a pagan holiday celebration. He may tell her to address some

envelopes so that he can send out holiday greeting cards that he alone signs, or he may insist that she pick up a specified item while shopping. The Christian wife must determine what to do, weighing on one side her interest in being subject to her husband and on the other side her desire to avoid personal participation in false religious celebrations. She should act so as to maintain a good conscience and be settled in her own mind that she has conducted herself in harmony with Bible principles—1 Cor. 10:31; *w01* 12/15 28-9; *w79* 11/1 31; *w71* 4/1 201-3.

The circumstances and motives involved will help a Christian to decide whether to accept a **Christmas bonus**. (*w79* 11/1 31-2; *w65* 12/15 768) This would also hold true in determining whether to organize a meal or gathering on the same day as a holiday.—*w79* 11/1 31-2; *g76* 11/22 9-13; *w67* 12/15 767-8.

Parents should be aware of **holiday activities that may be arranged in school** that could involve their children and result in compromise. These may include art, drama, writing, or music assignments. Substitute assignments that do not involve a compromise can often be arranged. (*ed* 14-30; *w84* 11/15 31; *w64* 9/1 533-8; *w64* 6/15 377-82; *w60* 11/15 703-4) Likewise, the Christian teacher would be responsible to handle teaching assignments in such a way that he does not compromise Bible principles.—*g62* 3/22 13-18.



It is not wrong for a Christian to rise, bow, or even prostrate himself before a political ruler or judge out of respect for his governmental position if that is the custom in the land. (Gen. 23:7; 42:6; 44:14; Rom. 13:7) However, if the act has some false religious significance or is done with a feeling of religious reverence, as to a god, it would be Scripturally wrong.—Acts 12:21-23.

Expressions such as ‘Let the king live to time indefinite’ may not necessarily be wrong. (1 Ki. 1:31; Neh. 2:3) But it is wrong to ascribe to a human ruler the powers of a god. In some places expressions of adulation for a ruler are required when his picture is displayed or in greeting other people; this is really an idolizing of him.—1 John 5:21; g77 7/22 27-8; *w68* 6/1 351-2.

The Scriptures urge Christians to be law-abiding. Of course, they put God's law first when human laws prohibit what God requires or require what God prohibits.—Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29-32.

When an individual inquires about **making purchases from someone engaged in illegal business** or in some other way is seeking the services of such a person or inquires about engaging personally in business or practices prohibited by law, suggest that he read Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, and 1 Peter 2:13, 14. Urge him to let his decision reflect what is there stated, both for his own protection and for the sake of his conscience.—*w*92 6/15 30-1.

As to the illegal use or sale of alcoholic beverages, see ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES.

Illegal aliens.—See ALIEN (ILLEGAL).

If the **elders learn of illegal activity or serious crime** on the part of one of the congregation members, they may not be obliged by law to report the offender or offense to secular authorities. If the law requires that certain situations about which the elders have knowledge be reported to the authorities, it is best before proceeding in such cases to consult with the branch office. In cases of illegal activities that also involve a breaking of God's law, the elders should give consideration to the case according to the circumstances. Still, God's Word does not charge the Christian congregation, through its

overseers, with the obligation to enforce "Caesar's" laws.—Philem. 8-22; *w*77 3/15 191-2.

A person approaching **baptism** who was **guilty of illegal activities before coming to a knowledge of the truth**—even things such as robbery or murder—is not required to settle these things with the authorities prior to his baptism. For example, a thief will not be required to make restitution to all those from whom he stole before his baptism, though in some cases his conscience may move him to do what he can to make restitution. The blood of Jesus Christ covers sins of such a new one; he may get baptized. Of course, "Caesar" may still seek to apprehend and prosecute him for illegal acts committed before his learning the truth. And this could result in punishment, which the individual will need to endure, but the brothers can provide appropriate encouragement and help. His being apprehended by the authorities after his baptism because of his past actions could reflect unfavorably on the Christian congregation, in which case he may not qualify for special privileges of service.—Num. 35:19-25; Isa. 1:18; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6; 1 John 1:7; *w*86 10/1 31; *w*78 9/15 30-1.

A person who has an illegal Social Security identification card or other such identification or is listed under an alias may qualify to be baptized. But he is not exemplary and will not be used in any responsible position in the congregation as long as the situation exists.

God's servants are sometimes imprisoned because of obeying his law. (Acts 12:5; 16:23; Phil. 1:7, 14) This can result in a testimony to God's honor and can be a test of the integrity of his servants. We are very much interested in those who are in prison for the sake of the good news.—Phil. 2:25; Heb. 10:34; 13:3; Rev. 2:10.

One of God's servants may be ordered to do work by a civilian or non-civilian prison keeper, just as Joseph was ordered to work in prison. (Gen. 39:22, 23) A Christian can do **work in prison** even as a slave would work for a master in the first century. (Eph. 6:5-7; Col. 3:22, 23) Each prisoner will have to determine whether he can do what he is called upon to perform. He should ask himself whether he would have performed such a service while outside of prison, for example, cleaning floors, cooking food, or making things for nonviolent use. He may be assigned to do farm work, to build highways, or to do other things for peaceful purposes. (g66 3/22 25-6) He would not work on or make a product that would clearly be used contrary to Bible principles.—Isa. 2:2-4; Rev. 18:4; *w*96 5/1 15-20; *w*86 9/1 17-22; *w*83 3/1 30-1.

One in prison because of refusing to compromise Christian neutrality may be called upon to **wear a soldier's uniform**. Would he have worn such a uniform before imprisonment? So would he want to wear one during imprisonment? If, though, he is not provided with any other clothing and must protect himself from the cold, he might choose to wear

the clothing inside out or in some way altered so as not to be identified as part of an establishment that is not in agreement with Isaiah 2:4. A Christian should not perform nonneutral work. In everything he should be guided by his conscience educated in the Word of God.

Regarding an elder who is imprisoned, see ELDERS AND MINISTERIAL SERVANTS.

Proper use of the Kingdom Hall is discussed in *Our Kingdom Service* for May 1976, pages 3-6. The hall is used principally for congregation meetings and as a center for field service.—*w93 6/15 28-31; od 120-5.*

With the permission of the Congregation Service Committee, the Kingdom Hall may be used for **weddings and funerals**. The Congregation Service Committee will decide what preparations may be made for such events and what announcements about the use of the hall may be made.—*w84 4/15 14-15; km 6/75 4; see also ALIEN (ILLEGAL).*

The Kingdom Hall cannot be used for marriages between a believer and an unbeliever. If there is some unusual situation, it is best to contact the branch office for advice.—*w82 3/15 31; km 12/81 4.*

In some lands a justice of the peace (or similar civil officer) must perform the **civil wedding ceremony** and may be willing to do so at the Kingdom Hall. If the couple desires that, the Congregation Service Committee can determine whether to permit such a civil ceremony at the Kingdom Hall, perhaps followed by a Scriptural talk. Doing so may have the advantage of enabling all to be certain that the papers are in order and that the marriage is going to be legally registered. If a civil ceremony is performed elsewhere and the couple desires that a Scriptural talk be given at the Kingdom Hall, it is best that this feature come soon after the civil marriage. The minister presiding may men-

tion that the legal step has already been taken. Some couples still choose to repeat the marriage vows before God and the congregation, and this is possible. This should be done, however, in the past tense, since they have already exchanged marriage vows at a civil ceremony.—*w84 4/15 12-14.*

The Kingdom Hall should not be used for **reenactment of marriage vows**, such as on an anniversary years later.—*km 1/77 4.*

The **information board** at the Kingdom Hall is to be used solely for matters involving the congregation and its activities. (*km 5/70 8*) With discretion, notices regarding meetings can be placed in newspapers.—*km 1/89 7; km 7/67 4.*

With regard to purchasing a building from a religious organization or selling a Kingdom Hall to such, see *w02 10/15 27.*

See also WEDDINGS.

Legal disputes between congregation members should be brought to the attention of the elders. (See COURT, TAKING A BROTHER TO.) However, there are legal matters that go beyond the authority of the congregation and that one or more of those involved may deem necessary to present to a court for judgment, such as getting a divorce decree, obtaining compensation from an insurance company, or being listed among creditors in bankruptcy proceedings. If one Witness took legal action against another, whether the matter was first taken to the elders or not, it would not be a violation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 for the brother being sued to defend himself. If such a defense required a countersuit, this would not necessarily be wrong. Much would depend upon the reason and the motive.—*w97* 3/15 21-2; *g79* 3/8 10-13; *w73* 11/15 703-4; *w63* 3/1 160.

Regarding taking an oath in court, see *The Watchtower* of January 15, 2003, page 21.

It is not the business of Jehovah's organization to try to rule on what are acceptable living quarters for everyone in the organization. In some parts of the earth, relatives are crowded into a single room, with virtually no privacy. Some, in their later years of life, may simply have a room of their own in the home of a single relative or of a friend who hospitably offers them a place to stay. Therefore, the circumstances should be carefully evaluated if questions arise about whether someone's living arrangements are Scripturally acceptable. For example, are there romantic interests between the parties involved? What are the sleeping arrangements?\* If certain circumstances give rise to **unfavorable talk in the community**, the elders should give Scriptural counsel. If the counsel is rejected, the principle at 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15 would apply, leading to the 'marking' of that one. Usually such a Witness should not be disfellowshipped unless there is evidence of immoral conduct.

Those **divorced** from each other should not continue living together in the same house, since their being accustomed to intimate relations with each other could readily lead to immoral conduct. (*w82* 9/1 31) If divorced individuals continue to live together under improper circumstances despite repeated

\*Note: the circumstances discussed here should be distinguished from the *strong circumstantial evidence* that may be used by an innocent mate to establish adultery, as discussed under "DIVORCE," "Evidence of *por-nei'a*."

counsel from the elders, a judicial committee can handle the situation.

At times, Witnesses may permit a **disfellowshipped relative** to move into their home. This can cause many problems. How this would be viewed by the congregation would depend upon the circumstances. Sickness or humanitarian factors could be involved. An elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer who allows this to occur with one of his disfellowshipped children or an elderly parent is not automatically disqualified. Much depends upon the physical needs of the disfellowshipped person, how he is conducting himself in the home, whether he is contaminating the spirituality of the family by living in their midst, and what effect this is having on the congregation. A disfellowshipped relative living in the home may be in attendance but not participate when the family Bible study is conducted. Also, in fulfilling their Scriptural duties to instruct and discipline a disfellowshipped minor son or daughter still living at home, parents may see the need to conduct a home Bible study with such one. —*w91* 4/15 22; *w88* 11/15 20; *w88* 4/15 26-31; *w86* 3/15 18; *w83* 1/1 30-1; *w81* 9/15 28-9.

Some Christians may conclude that they ought to **care for an aged or ill parent in their home even though that one does not live by Bible standards**. They should try to see that wrong conduct does not occur in the home. The impact on special privileges would depend on how the congregation and community view the situation

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and what other reasonable options exist. Each situation must be considered on its own merits. It would be similar if an aged or sick Christian had to live in the home of relatives who do not follow Bible morality.

If Christian parents allow their worldly son or daughter to live in fornication in their home, thus giving tacit approval to what is taking place, they are certainly not exemplary. If when asked about the matter, they express concern over the fact that what they are doing may be stumbling others but feel that they have no recourse for certain reasons, no judicial action would be taken. On the other hand, if when approached by the elders they manifest a brazen attitude, not even caring if others are stumbled, but still do not encourage others to do what they are doing, it may be that the elders will decide to give a warning talk to the congregation. However, if the parents actively promote the practice of allowing individuals who live in fornication to move into a Christian home, encouraging others to do the same, the matter could be handled judicially on the grounds of condoning "fornication," causing "divisions" and, in effect, speaking against "the teaching of the Christ."—Gal. 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:10, 11; 2 John 9-11; Rev. 2:20.

It is not possible to cover here all aspects of this subject. Some points will be discussed, and helpful references are provided as an aid in answering inquiries.—See also DIVORCE and FAMILY AFFAIRS.

Occasionally letters are received from **single brothers and sisters who would like to get married** but have not been successful in finding a suitable mate among Jehovah's people. They may present various problems and request advice. Help the Witness to reason according to the principles in Jehovah's Word. Stress that it is because Jehovah wants to safeguard our spiritual interests and wants us to avoid serious problems in life that he commands that we marry only a fellow believer.—1 Cor. 7:39; g99 8/8 18-19; w89 11/1 18-22; g79 3/22 27-8.

There are practical things that a person can do to make himself or herself more desirable as a marriage mate, notably to continue cultivating spiritual qualities. The following references may be helpful: w96 10/15 12-14; w92 5/15 12-15; w87 11/15 10-20; w86 11/15 26-30; w82 6/15 10-15; g77 1/8 8-12.

Christians view **engagement to marry** as a serious commitment. (Matt. 5:37) Love of neighbor should prevent anyone from having a casual attitude toward becoming engaged, realizing the emotional hurt that could result from breaking an engagement. (w99 8/15 30-1) Ending an engagement is basically a private matter, although there may be a need for counsel. Ordinarily, elders do

not need to inquire into such a matter unless complaint is lodged with them by one of the parties or there is evidence that a number in the congregation are disturbed. As to factors regarding one who has a position of responsibility in the congregation or one who is in full-time service, see *The Watchtower* of June 15, 1975, pages 382-4.

Since marriage is a divine arrangement, Scriptural standards are of greater significance than is secular law. Nevertheless, since Christians are urged to "be obedient to governments and authorities as rulers," they conform to all secular requirements that do not actually or by the way they are enforced conflict with divine law.—Titus 3:1, 2.

If there was **fornication** with a third party **during the engagement** period and this was found out after the marriage was performed, a judicial committee could handle the case of fornication. Since that fornication occurred before the wedding, it cannot serve as a Scriptural basis for divorce that frees the innocent mate for remarriage.—w99 8/15 31.

Regarding the use of the Kingdom Hall for **weddings** and who may perform marriages, see KINGDOM HALL and WEDDINGS.

An elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer who encourages, allows, or gives tacit approval to **the marriage of his believing son or daughter to someone who is not a baptized** Christian is going contrary to the spirit of what is recorded at 1 Corinthians 7:



39 and Deuteronomy 7:3. If a rebellious or delinquent minor child who rejects the Christian way insists on a parental signature for permission to marry a worldly person, it is up to the Christian parent to decide whether to give permission. In either case, the parent's qualifications to serve in an exemplary position should be reconsidered, having in mind what is stated at 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12, 13.—*w65* 1/15 62-3.

**Marrying a disfellowshipped person.**—See DISFELLOWSHIPPING.

For a discussion of **remarriage in countries where divorce is not permitted** or where divorce may take many years or be prohibitively expensive, see *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1977, pages 177-85; see also DIVORCE.

**Declaration Pledging Faithfulness:** This Declaration has been provided particularly for use in countries where divorce on any grounds is forbidden by the government. Generally the Declaration is not acceptable where the law of "Caesar" provides for divorce and remarriage. (*w87* 2/15 31) However, in some countries where divorce is allowed but many, many years may be involved in obtaining it, those who are living together when they learn the truth may be allowed to sign the Declaration Pledging Faithfulness and continue living with each other as they work to straighten out their marital situation. Similarly, a **baptized Christian** who finds that "Caesar's" laws do not grant him legal recognition in his exercise of God-given rights regarding divorce and remarriage

may use the Declaration Pledging Faithfulness. For example, a brother's wife commits adultery and he chooses not to forgive her, yet divorce is not allowed in his country or a divorce will require many years to obtain. In that case, after clear evidence of adultery is presented to the elders of his congregation, he and a sister Scripturally free to marry may sign statements pledging faithfulness and the determination to gain legal recognition of their status should such become feasible.—*w77* 3/15 182-5; see page 183 for text of the Declaration Pledging Faithfulness.

The signing of the Declaration Pledging Faithfulness is viewed by the congregation as putting on record before God and man that the signer will be just as faithful to his or her existing marital relationship as he or she would be if the union was validated by civil authorities. If the secular law changes and permits divorce or other factors permit a legal marriage, such as the death of the legal mate, the couple should take the necessary steps to go through a legal marriage ceremony.—*w87* 2/15 31; *w85* 11/1 31.

If a Witness who is Scripturally free to marry wants to enter into a **marriage with an unbaptized person under circumstances that are not approved by secular law**, he will not be allowed to sign a Declaration Pledging Faithfulness, since he is going contrary to the counsel to marry "only in the Lord." (1 Cor. 7:39) This applies to a person who desires to undertake a new marriage of this sort, not to someone

who was living in such an irregular “marital” arrangement when learning the truth.

If a couple are **Scripturally free to marry** but they live in a country where there is no divorce and they cannot secure the necessary legal documents because of circumstances beyond their control and are therefore allowed to sign a **Declaration Pledging Faithfulness**, their signing should be witnessed by others. However, no marriage ceremony is arranged in connection with this, either privately or at the **Kingdom Hall**.

**Common-law marriage:** This is defined as “the relationship between a couple who call themselves man and wife, but have not been married by a civil or religious ceremony. Common-law marriage is recognized in some states and not in others.” (*World Book Dictionary*) To provide protection for the marriage mates and their offspring and to avoid needless reproach on the Christian congregation, it is required that where possible, common-law marriage be registered with the government before the parties thereto are acceptable for baptism.

If a person living in a *legally recognized* common-law marriage learns the truth and wants to be baptized but is **not successful in persuading the mate to get the common-law marriage legally registered**, a concession is made to the believer so that this one may sign a Declaration Pledging Faithfulness and then get baptized. (*w77*

3/15 182-5; *w62* 5/1 287-8) If the couple later move to a place where their common-law relationship is not legally recognized, they may encounter difficulty, but this does not alter the fact that the believer has been accepted into the congregation of Jehovah’s people.

Regarding **customary (tribal) and civil marriages**, see *The Watchtower* of October 15, 2006, pages 20-1.

**Incestuous union:** “Incest” refers to sexual connection between close relatives. For Christians, a vital factor is the desire to maintain honor in marriage and to avoid bringing it into disrepute, taking into consideration the consciences of others, both inside and outside the Christian congregation. (1 Cor. 10:32, 33; 2 Cor. 4:2; Heb. 13:4) Anyone in a parent-child or a brother-sister marriage union (including half-brother and half-sister relationships) is viewed as unacceptable in the Christian congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses and hence unacceptable for baptism. (Any possible exception should be referred to the Governing Body.) Anyone who is a baptized member of the congregation and who enters into such a union would rightly be disfellowshipped. As to other unions involving closeness by blood or through marriage, see *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1978, pages 25-8.—*w02* 2/1 29.

If **prior to learning the truth a person got an unscriptural divorce and then remarried**, he could be baptized. However, if a previously married person had been legally divorced but

there was no Scriptural basis for it and since then neither party had been immoral or remarried, the original marriage would still be Scripturally binding. The individual could be baptized but would be viewed as still married in the sight of God and thus not presently free to remarry.—*w80 1/15 30-1.*

Death ends a marriage. (1 Cor. 7:39)  
What if a **mate is long missing and presumed dead?** The law may allow that after a set time and a diligent but unsuccessful search for the person, he or she may be declared legally dead. If that occurs and the “survivor” truly believes the absentee to be dead, he or she may remarry but should be willing to bear responsibility before God.—*w69 7/15 447-8.*

With regard to the marriage ceremony and conduct at wedding receptions, see *w00 5/1 19-22; w97 4/15 23-6; w84 4/15 10-22; and w69 1/15 57-61.*

There are numerous types of health treatment available. What helps one person may not benefit another. (g01 1/8 26-7) You should not recommend specific forms of treatment. If *Awake!* has discussed a certain form of treatment, you may refer the inquirer to that article as a source of information, though emphasizing that he must make his own decision.—w94 12/15 19-22; w82 6/15 22-9.

When our brothers need urgent help in **locating a physician** or a surgeon who will respect the Christian stand on blood, likely the Hospital Liaison Committees can be of assistance to them by supplying the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of doctors who have in the past provided medical care without resorting to a blood transfusion. The branch office can assist in this regard also, according to the circumstances and need. In doing so, always point out that we are neither recommending nor endorsing these doctors or any particular medical procedure. Our passing along a name does not put the physician under obligation to treat a patient. Just because he respected the Christian stand on blood in the past does not mean that he will automatically do so again. Each patient should take every precaution to see that his conscientious views on blood are respected.

At times letters or telephone calls are received from **those who suffer from some type of depression**. The Bible counsels that we should “speak consolingly to the depressed souls” and

show “fellow feeling.” (1 Thess. 5:14; 1 Pet. 3:8) Depression can have physiological causes, such as disease, nutritional deficiencies, and hormonal imbalance, but on such causes we should not offer advice. In other instances the problem is the result of anger, grief, or guilt (real or imagined); unsettled conflicts with others; or abuse suffered earlier in life. Regarding such causes, the Bible offers practical counsel.—Prov. 15:13; w90 3/1 3-4.

Use appropriate scriptures to reassure the depressed brother that his situation is not hopeless; that Jehovah loves and will support those who feel brokenhearted, crushed, and self-condemned (Ps. 34:18; 37:23, 24; 51:17; Phil. 2:25-30; 1 John 3:20; g02 7/22 19-23; w00 12/1 26-7; w90 3/15 26-30); that the Christian brotherhood ‘holds him dear’ (1 Cor. 12:14-16, 25, 26); and that Jehovah considers him precious (w95 4/1 10-15; w90 2/15 21-3; w83 10/1 27-31). Direct his attention to what Jehovah’s organization has published on coping with depression. (w90 3/1 3-9; w88 11/15 21-4; w88 10/15 25-9; g87 10/22 3-16; g81 10/22 23-7; g81 9/8 7-10; g81 8/8 5-12) Recommend that he seek help from elders in his congregation.—w90 3/15 26-30; g87 11/8 12-16; w82 6/1 9-14.

Whether to seek professional help in coping with emotional problems is a matter for each one to decide. (See discussion of “**Psychiatry**” below.) Elders should deal carefully and compassionately with a person who is suicidal. (g01 10/22 9; g01 9/8 10-14; w90 3/15 29-30; g87 11/8 16; g81 10/22 23-7) Usually, a

judicial hearing is not required when suicide is attempted.—*w00* 9/15 3-7; *g94* 4/8 23-5; *w83* 8/1 6-11.

**Abortion:** Deliberate abortion constitutes a willful taking of human life. (Ex. 21:22-25; 1 John 3:15; *g95* 3/8 25-7; *g93* 5/22 3-11; *g87* 4/8 3-16; *w82* 2/1 6; *g80* 5/22 10-16; *w77* 8/1 478-80) While a doctor may believe that allowing a pregnancy to continue will pose a potential threat (even a serious one) to the mother, that “potential” does not justify taking the life of a child. As to lifesaving operations in which abortion is not the objective, such as surgery for cancer of the uterus of a pregnant woman or for tubal pregnancy, a personal decision must be made. (*w75* 3/15 191-2) If **at the time of delivery** a choice must be made between the life of the mother and the life of the unborn child, it is up to the individuals concerned to make that choice, although there are considerations that favor the mother’s life. (*rs* 26; *w69* 12/15 768, fn.) Though the use of birth control is a personal matter, some methods may function in a way that is abortive. Christian couples should carefully weigh whether any method they are considering would show lack of respect for the sanctity of life and the procreative powers.—*w99* 6/15 27-8; *g93* 2/22 8-9; *w89* 6/15 29; *w79* 5/15 30-1; *g74* 1/22 15; see also FAMILY AFFAIRS.

**Hypnotism:** Hypnotism is not for Christians. Urge the inquirer not to submit his mind and body to the will of a hypnotist. The Christian has dedicated both mind and body to Jehovah and is

responsible to Him for their use. (Ps. 40:7, 8; Rom. 12:1) Alert the person to what the Bible says about the need to avoid being bound by a spell. (Deut. 18: 11, 12; *g74* 9/8 27-8; *g65* 5/22 8-12) Even the use of self-hypnosis tapes and self-induced trances should be avoided. (*g89* 6/8 31; *w63* 3/15 186-7) We need not conclude, however, that everyone who has been hypnotized has deliberately shared in spiritism.—See DISFELLOWSHIPING.

**Other procedures** that are claimed to be effective in healing or diagnosis may raise questions as to whether spiritism is involved, for that may seem to be the only explanation for the effects or results sometimes noted. Yet, the mere fact that a health technique may defy one’s ability to explain how it works does not in itself mean that a form of spiritism must be involved. Some diagnostic and treatment techniques, such as the use of a pendulum, may involve forms of spiritism. (*g01* 1/8 26-7; *w94* 12/15 20-2; *w62* 11/15 677-80) We can appropriately caution brothers in this regard, but remember that opinions vary and that it is not the responsibility of the branch office to pass judgment on every procedure used to maintain health or to treat disease. Some procedures may be nothing more than quackery, but such matters should be left to personal decision. Each one has the responsibility to investigate and decide what is best for him or her, keeping Scriptural principles in mind. No one should allow such concerns to become divisive issues, nor should anyone

promote these procedures in the congregation.—Prov. 14:15; g00 10/22 3-12; w94 12/15 19-22; w82 6/15 25-9.

**Illegal therapies:** If someone inquires about accepting a form of treatment forbidden by “Caesar” or about using an unlicensed practitioner, advise him to consider Romans 13:1-7. (Matt. 22:21) As with inquiries about other illegal activities, urge the individual to be a law-abiding citizen. However, remember that it is not the congregation’s responsibility to be an arm of the law. The congregation should not support individuals’ violating the law. Those who choose to use illegal treatment must accept responsibility for any consequences, such as punishment by “Caesar.” If because of employing illegal treatment a Christian causes disturbance or loses the respect of the congregation in general, it could affect his privileges of service.—w83 8/15 31.

**Postponing death:** The Bible does not require that every possible medical means be employed to extend life when the dying process is already well under way. There is a difference, though, between not extending the dying process by mechanical means and practicing euthanasia (mercy killing). The latter would be a positive effort to cause a person’s death, which would be in violation of God’s law.—g91 10/22 7-9; g78 3/8 4-7; g74 5/8 27-8.

**Psychiatry:** Whether a Christian will consult a psychiatrist or psychologist or other practitioner who deals with

mental or emotional problems is a matter for personal decision. True Christians have deep faith in the Bible’s value and power to give guidance, realizing that its Author knows more about humans, including the human mind, than physicians do. Thus, what is often of great value is balanced Scriptural counsel. In cases of serious mental illness, it may be advisable that the individual concerned seek professional help, but this is a decision to be made by him or by those authorized to act on his behalf. (w90 3/15 29-30; g87 11/8 16) Any advice or therapy that may be offered by a mental-health professional should be examined in the light of “the wisdom from above.” (Jas. 3:17) It is good to recognize that the methods used may vary from psychiatrist to psychiatrist.—w96 9/1 30-1; w88 11/15 21-4; w88 10/15 25-9.

**Sterilization:** The Bible shows God’s high regard for the reproductive powers. (Gen. 1:28; 9:1; Deut. 23:1; 25:11, 12) A Christian should not submit to or approve of sterilization simply as a convenient method of birth control or out of lack of appreciation for God’s gift of the procreative powers. If pregnancy would pose a real and substantial threat to the life of a woman, some couples may conclude that sterilization is an advisable last resort. Urge those who inquire about sterilization to study *The Watchtower* of June 15, 1999, pages 27 and 28. If a person approved of sterilization, not as a life-protecting measure, but out of lack of respect for God’s viewpoint, it would affect that one’s eligibility for special service privileges.

**Transplanting of body organs:**

While some Christians find human organ transplantation repugnant, viewing it as cannibalistic, others observe that the Bible does not definitely rule out medical transplanting of human tissue (or organs) as long as this does not also involve blood transfusions. The individual should carefully and prayerfully weigh matters and then decide before God. Direct attention to *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1980, page 31. Though blood is sometimes considered a human organ, accepting a transfusion is not the same as accepting other organs. There is no Scriptural objection to accepting a transplant of an animal part other than blood.—g82 6/22 26; w80 3/15 31.

Regarding bone-marrow transplants, see *The Watchtower*, May 15, 1984, page 31.

As long as new ones who come to our meetings are orderly and not troublemakers, they may be called on for **comments** at the discretion of the study conductor. That is so even if they are church members, are involved in nonneutral activities, are not properly married, or have not overcome the tobacco habit. Commenting at meetings is part of our educational program; it does not mean that we acknowledge all who comment as being part of our organization. While we may acknowledge the hand of a new one and permit him to comment, if it becomes known that he is a practicer of serious sin who has not made expected improvements and corrections over a period of time, the elders would undoubtedly decide that he should no longer be allowed to comment. Elders should be on the alert so that notorious wrongdoers do not slip in and participate and do harm.—*km* 4/75 4.

Newly interested ones may **enroll in the Theocratic Ministry School** as long as they are living in harmony with Scriptural principles. If it is evident that a person's conduct or views are in conflict with God's principles (using drugs or tobacco, leading an immoral life, and so forth), he does not qualify to be enrolled.—*be* 282.

See also MEMORIAL.



There are countless organizations to which people belong. It is **not our business to make decisions for our brothers** as to the propriety of membership in these. However, if you know that joining a particular organization could put a Witness in line for being disfellowshipped or would mean that he was disassociating himself from the congregation, you should certainly explain that to him.—Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19, 20.

When someone inquires about becoming a member of a certain organization, **urge the inquirer to learn more about the organization** by studying its chartered purpose and determining the nature of its activities as well as what membership would require of him. This is important because his joining an organization could adversely affect his relationship with Jehovah God as well as have a bad effect on him. It could also affect whether others would view him as a good example. Encourage him to ask himself: ‘What are my reasons for wanting to become a member of this organization? Is it simply for educational or business benefits that are not otherwise available? Or does it involve a desire for association with worldly people in a social way? What effect would membership in this organization have on my spirituality and on the time I have available for studying the Bible, attending meetings, sharing in field service, and caring for my responsibilities at home? If I become a member, what would I be called on to do? Are the chartered purposes of the organization in harmony with Bible principles? Would

others be stumbled or upset if I become a member of such an organization?’—John 15:19; 1 Cor. 10:29, 31-33; Eph. 5:15-17; Phil. 2:4; 3:12-15; 1 John 2:15-17; Rev. 18:4; *w97* 6/1 3-4; *w79* 1/1 30-1.

There is no need for brothers in the branch office to do a great deal of research into the chartered purposes of various organizations. If you have some information readily available, you can pass that along to one who inquires, but otherwise such investigation is the responsibility of the individual.

It is preferable, wherever possible, that **each congregation hold its own separate Memorial celebration** for the benefit of those in the congregation territory.

**Time:** The Lord's Evening Meal was instituted by Jesus on the occasion of the Jewish Passover, and this occurred after sunset. So the Memorial celebration should occur after sundown. If the talk begins before sunset, the passing of the emblems should not occur until after sunset. It would be good for the local congregations to determine ahead of time when local sunset will be on the date of the Memorial observance that year. For helpful comments about establishing sunset time, see *w90* 2/15 13-15; *rs* 269; *w77* 6/15 383-4; *km* 12/76 2-3; and *w76* 2/1 72-3.

**Date:** Well in advance, the Governing Body publishes the date for each year's observance of the Memorial. The date, according to the Jewish calendar, is Nisan 14. This is usually on or very close to the day of the full moon. (*w90* 2/15 15) If brothers are cut off from contact with the Governing Body, they can observe the Memorial on the evening of the calendar date of the first full moon *after* the spring equinox.—*w93* 2/1 31; *w85* 2/15 31; *w77* 6/15 383-4; *w76* 2/1 73-4.

**Emergency or curfew:** If an emergency, such as a violent storm, arises making it impossible for the congregation to come together at the appointed time, the brothers should endeavor

to meet in small neighborhood groups or in family groups if necessary. If no brother is present, a capable sister with a head covering can consider the Bible account at Matthew 26:17-30; Luke 22:7-23, 28-30; and 1 Corinthians 11:20-31. If a congregation has to meet in small groups, the combined attendance of the groups should be sent in as a report for the congregation. (*w76* 2/1 73-4) If a country suddenly imposes a curfew that prevents the brothers from gathering for the Memorial at the appointed time, they can meet together in small groups as suggested above. In the exceptional case where one of the anointed remnant is unable to partake, he may wish to observe the Memorial 30 days later on an individual basis.—*w03* 3/15 31; *w93* 2/1 31; *w85* 2/15 31; *w76* 2/1 73-4.

**Unable to obtain emblems:** If the brothers cannot obtain suitable emblems because of being in prison or owing to other circumstances, they should nevertheless endeavor to meet together and discuss the Scriptural accounts, as mentioned above. They can be counted as having assembled with their brothers worldwide for this important occasion.

**Disfellowshipped persons:** While we do not invite disfellowshipped persons to the Memorial, if a disfellowshipped person comes, he will be permitted to attend as long as he does not cause a disturbance, as is true of his attending other meetings at the Kingdom Hall. When a disfellowshipped person is sitting in a row, the emblems can

be passed to him as they would be to anyone attending for the first time.

**Counting Partakers:** If any unbaptized or disfellowshipped person partakes of the emblems, he is not to be counted as a partaker.—*w76 2/1 76.*

Jehovah's Witnesses are **neutral with regard to the political and military** affairs of the nations. (See *Reasoning*, under "Neutrality.") The Witnesses do not interfere with what others do as to voting in political elections, running for political office, campaigning for politicians, or joining the military. (Concerning voting, see *w99* 11/1 28-9; see also POLITICAL ELECTIONS.) But since true Christians are "no part of the world," a baptized Christian who deliberately pursues a course in violation of Christian neutrality removes (disassociates) himself from the congregation of Jehovah's people.—John 15:19; 17:14-16; 1 John 2:19.

What an individual chooses to do as to **military service** or work assigned by the government as a substitute for such service is up to him. **Do not tell anyone whether he should do such service or refrain from it.** But in harmony with Jesus' instructions, the congregation of Jehovah's people itself is "no part of the world" and so is neutral as to the world's conflicts. If the congregation were to recognize as members **any who do not maintain Christian neutrality**, the congregation itself would cease to be neutral and to fit Jesus' description of his true followers. (Matt. 26:52; Mark 12:31) The congregation submits to Jehovah's judgment as set out at Isaiah 2:4 and avoids allowing itself to be maneuvered into a position in opposition to Jehovah God and his Son. (Rev. 16:13, 14; 19:11-21) All who are associated with the Christian congregation as members thereof must also be

neutral as to the world's conflicts but whole-souled in their obedience to Jehovah God and Jesus Christ.—*w96* 5/1 9-20.

If someone in military service, as Cornelius was, is making progress in embracing the truth and expresses interest in baptism, the elders should discuss the situation with him to be sure that he understands what is involved and appreciates that taking a resolute stand may bring much opposition. If it is clear that he accepts Jehovah's judgment of matters as set out at Isaiah 2:4, **he may get baptized if he has unmistakably taken his stand and is resolutely displaying by his conduct** that he is willing to live in harmony with what is set out in the Scriptures, even if doing so causes others to oppose him. (Acts 10:1, 47, 48; *it-1* 513; *w86* 9/1 17-22; *li* 274-94) On the other hand, if someone is not really living in harmony with what Jehovah has had recorded at Isaiah 2:4, baptism "in the name of the Father" would be meaningless. (Matt. 26:52; 28:19; Mic. 4:1-3; John 18:36; Eph. 6:11-18; see *Reasoning*, under "Neutrality.") No one should be invited to share in the **field service** until he has clearly demonstrated that he is living in accord with Isaiah 2:4. The same applies to a person who comes to a knowledge of the truth while doing nonneutral secular work under military direction.

When the elders learn that a member of the congregation intends to take a course that would be in violation of Christian neutrality, it would

be a kindness for them to talk with him about what the Bible has to say on the matter, for perhaps his plans were made in ignorance. However, **if he is determined to pursue a nonneutral course**, he repudiates the Scriptural beliefs of the congregation of which he was a part and thereby disassociates himself from it. The Congregation's Publisher Record card of such a person would be removed from the congregation file of active associates. An announcement is usually made that the individual is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The person himself should be told orally what his situation is. Publishers whose homes may be visited by the disassociated one can also be informed orally. Neutral Christians would treat such an individual in harmony with the Scriptures.—1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 John 9, 10; *w*81 9/15 23.

If **civilian national service** is offered to all citizens, including Christians who refuse activity that is contrary to Isaiah 2:4, each individual Christian should decide according to his Bible-trained conscience whether he can accept such service. Before deciding, he should make sure that the civilian national service does not in any way support or promote a nonneutral endeavor or bring him under the oversight of false religion. (Mic. 4:3, 5; Mark 12:17; Rom. 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1, 2) If he refuses to accept such service, he should be prepared for the consequences of his decision. Whatever decision he makes will be respected by the congregation as long as he maintains his neutrality.—*w*96 5/1 15-20.

A baptized Witness who took up a nonneutral service or in some other way compromised his neutrality according to our understanding at the time, thereby disassociating himself, but who later **wishes to become a member of the congregation again** should make written request to that effect to the body of elders.—*w*91 4/15 23.

Sometimes those who are beyond the age for compulsory service contrary to Isaiah 2:4 **wish to return to the country of their birth**. Before they are permitted to do so, they are called upon to pay a punitive tax because they have not performed their required service. If such a tax is paid, they are not considered to be violators of their neutrality unless the tax is paid directly to the military.

If in an emergency a government requests the temporary use of Kingdom Halls, vehicles, or other things owned by the congregation, it would not be a violation of neutrality to comply. In some lands the **government decrees that all individuals do a certain amount of labor for public works**, such as building roads or working in fields. Where this is comparable to a tax and not in violation of Isaiah 2:4, there is no objection to complying as long as the work involved is not contrary to other Bible principles. (Matt. 5:41; 22:21) Similarly, if the **government assigns** a Christian to do work at a voting office, such as keeping records or keeping order on election day, but he himself does not have to vote or encourage political activity, he has to decide what to do

according to his conscience.—*w99* 11/1  
28-9.

Regarding forms of address and respect shown to government officials, see *w68* 6/1 351-2; see also HONOR TO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

Regarding wearing a uniform in prison, see IMPRISONMENT.

Purchasing **government bonds** for investment purposes is a matter for personal decision. However, if the declared purpose of the bonds is in conflict with what is recorded at Isaiah 2:4, then one who is endeavoring to live in harmony with that Scriptural statement would choose to invest his money in another manner.

See the printed memorandum supplied by Jehovah's organization. Apart from that, encourage the inquirers to cooperate with or check with the local circuit news representative.

An **Office of Public Information** has been established in Brooklyn to help counteract the increasing use of the media by those trying to slander Jehovah's name and his organization. This department operates under the supervision of the Coordinators' Committee of the Governing Body. As to how branches can cooperate with and/or utilize the services of this department, see *Branch Organization*.

Since Christians are no part of the world, they do not take sides in its political affairs, although they do not interfere with what other people choose to do in this regard. (John 17:16; Jas. 1:27; 4:4; 1 John 2:15) Jesus Christ set the example for his followers by declining to accept political office on earth. (Matt. 4:8-10; John 6:15; see also NEUTRALITY and EMPLOYMENT.) Early Christians avoided all political involvement.—*w99* 11/1 28-9; *rs* 269-76; *g84* 9/8 28; *li* 295-320.

—*w99* 11/1 28-9; *w64* 5/15 308; *w50* 11/15 445-6.

At times members of a community are invited to express their wishes regarding neighborhood improvements. There is no harm in expressing one's opinion on such improvements, even doing so in writing, as by signing a petition. But when local political means are used to obtain opinions, it is best to keep in mind the principles set out above.—*w83* 3/1 30-1.

If a person comes to a knowledge of the truth while having a political party membership card, we would not tell him to destroy the card. However, as long as he retains the card, he does not qualify to share in field service or to be baptized.—*w76* 8/15 491; *g72* 12/8 20.

If to qualify for certain types of employment a person must be registered as eligible to vote, he may comply with the requirement, provided he does not indicate any political affiliation. It may simply be the community's way of asking an individual to go on record that he is a citizen. The test of his Christian neutrality comes at the time of an election.



This is a matter for personal decision in accord with Bible principles. Here are some **factors to consider**:

A mature Christian should not be critical of others, but he should personally avoid things that may cause some to stumble.—Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 10:23, 24.

The Christian should keep a good conscience, asking himself, ‘Would Jehovah approve?’ (1 Pet. 3:21) He should always conduct himself in a way that glorifies God.—1 Cor. 10:31.

If a minor is involved, parents are to decide, the father making the final decision. Children show respect for Jehovah’s arrangement by submitting to the parental decision.—Col. 3:20; *yp* 26-33, 296-303.

No Christian would want to engage in sports that involve undue danger to the health or life of self or others. Our lives are dedicated to Jehovah God. We should not take unnecessary risks.—Luke 10:27; Rom. 12:1; *g00* 10/8 18-19; *g81* 12/22 20-3; *g74* 6/22 12-14; *g70* 3/22 4-8.

Spiritually mature Christians must avoid worldly associations and seek wholesome relaxation with fellow believers. (1 Cor. 15:33; *w99* 9/1 8-16, 23; *g97* 5/22 3-10; *w92* 8/15 15-20; *yp* 65-80; *w79* 6/1 12-20; *w77* 9/1 521-6) Of course, no Christian would socialize with disfellowshipped persons.—Ps. 26:4-6; 1 Pet. 4:3, 4; 2 John 10, 11.

Christians refrain from engaging in loose, brazen conduct or in anything

that is recognized as unclean. It is improper to engage in conduct that stimulates immoral sexual desires in you or in others.—Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Pet. 4:3, 4; *g02* 7/8 19-21; *yp* 181-211, 219-60; *w79* 6/1 3-20.

It is dangerous to fill one’s mind with corrupting thoughts; one should seek what is wholesome and uplifting.—Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8; *w02* 8/1 20-2; *yp* 283-95.

Christians should not relegate spiritual interests to the background by engaging in an unbalanced pursuit of recreation.—1 Tim. 4:8; *yp* 296-303.

Recreation should basically offer a person (1) a change of mental and physical pace and/or (2) opportunity to learn something new and of educational value.—*g97* 5/22 8-10; *g82* 5/22 9-11; *w79* 6/1 16-20; *g79* 1/22 3-12; *w71* 5/1 280.

In order for a person to be reinstated into the Christian congregation, he must be sincerely repentant, must have discontinued his former wrong conduct, and must be “doing works that befit repentance.” (Acts 26:20; Matt. 3:8; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; *w81 9/1 24-6*) In addition, there are other **factors to consider**, such as, the passage of an appropriate amount of time, the attitude of the congregation, and the notoriety of the wrongdoing. —Acts 3:19; 2 Cor. 2:5-7; 12:21; *it-2 771*.

In considering pleas for reinstatement, the elders should judge matters on the basis of the individual’s repentance, not solely on problems or notoriety that the case produced. (*w95 1/1 27-31; w81 9/1 25-6; w77 3/1 146-52*) Yet, where the original sin indicated scheming or collusion, due caution is in order. (*w79 11/15 31-2*) In cases of adultery, the determining factor in granting reinstatement is, not whether the innocent mate forgives and decides to continue the marriage, but whether the sinner has truly repented.

When people get into difficulties, they may for some time face problems as a consequence, such as those resulting from adultery or unscriptural remarriage. (Gal. 6:7) As long as their repentance is genuine and their lives are now morally clean, their reinstatement need not wait until all their problems are resolved.

If while **disfellowshipped** a person **began living with someone who was not Scripturally divorced** and a divorce could not be obtained in the

country, the congregation would not necessarily require that they separate before the individual could be reinstated. If the body of elders are convinced of the person’s repentance, they can reinstate that one and let him or her sign a **Declaration Pledging Faithfulness**.—*w77 3/15 182-5*.

In the case of a person disfellowshipped for **stealing**, the congregation ought **not to insist on full restitution** before it would be possible to reinstate him. True, the principles in the Mosaic Law do encourage restitution. (Ex. 22:1, 3, 4) But we are not under the Law, so each individual can do what is possible or what his conscience moves him to do. His reinstatement is determined by his repentance and not by his ability to provide full restitution, although his desire to make restitution to the extent of his ability may be a factor in determining repentance.—*w78 9/15 30-1*.

If a **disfellowshipped person moves to the territory of another congregation**, no announcement should be made of his disfellowshipped status. However, the body of elders in the congregation to which the disfellowshipped person moves should be notified, if possible, so that they will know how to deal with the situation. If the disfellowshipped person seeks reinstatement, a judicial committee of the congregation in whose territory he is currently located could hear his plea for reinstatement. Without informing the disfellowshipped person, they could then make their confidential report and recommendation to the judicial commit-

tee in the congregation that disfellowshipped him. In recommending reinstatement to the original congregation, the elders should not be hasty. Rather, they should have observed the person for a considerable period and be completely satisfied that he has repented and can be reinstated without spiritual danger to the congregation. (2 Cor. 2:6, 7) It would be up to the elders in the congregation that did the disfellowshipping to determine whether to reinstate the person.

If an individual was **disfellowshipped in a place where Jehovah's Witnesses are now under ban** and it is not possible to communicate with the congregation that disfellowshipped him, the elders in the congregation where he now associates can use their good judgment in handling any **appeal for reinstatement**. Before concluding that it is not possible to get in touch with the original congregation, the elders should correspond with the Service Committee of the Governing Body to see if there is some means of contacting the original congregation.

Should further information come to light at a later date showing that he was not worthy of reinstatement, the reinstatement could be rescinded in view of the new information.

If because of serious wrongdoing, preaching privileges were removed from one previously recognized as an unbaptized publisher and he later repents and wishes to be recognized again as an unbaptized publisher, two elders

will follow a procedure similar to that followed in reinstating disfellowshipped ones.—*od* 157-8; see also DISFELLOWSHIPPING.

Generally, connections with religious organizations are avoided, in accord with Revelation 18:4.

If someone has an **existing business connection** with a religious organization, such as an insurance policy with a religious group or a plot in a church graveyard, it is for that person to decide whether he wants to continue the business connection.

In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to **rent or lease from a religious organization** facilities to be used for a meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses. Ordinarily such places are available for public events. If the brothers are going to have the exclusive use of the facility on such an occasion, it is simply a business matter, since the premises are under their rental control. We should avoid situations where regular or extensive contact with representatives of false religion would be necessary.—*km 7/69 4.*

**Purchasing a religious building** in order to convert it into a Kingdom Hall is simply a business transaction. Similarly, there is no need to rule out the possibility of **selling a Kingdom Hall** to a religious organization. If that is done, it is best to try to arrange such for cash instead of for time payments that would require regular contact with that organization. Perhaps the purchaser could obtain a loan from a bank and complete the sale in that way. The same principle would apply to a personal business transaction of this nature.—*w02 10/15 27; km 7/69 4.*

There is no objection to advertising our meeting times in a free **newspaper listing of religious services** if the format does not appear objectionable.—*km 7/67 4.*

See also EMPLOYMENT and FAMILY AFFAIRS.

Regarding the severing of one's relationship with a religious organization before baptism, see BAPTISM.

Concerning membership in an organization that may have some religious connections, see MEMBERSHIP IN VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS.

Most Christian couples have found it advisable that their children receive basic school education provided by the government in their country. Parents are responsible for **deciding on the nature and extent of this secular education.** (Prov. 6:20-22; Eph. 6:4) Two basic principles apply: (1) In most countries “Caesar” requires that parents send their children to school or arrange a certain amount of education for them. (2) The Bible requires Christians to support themselves, even if they are full-time pioneer ministers. (Mark 12:17; 2 Thess. 3:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 3:1; *w*92 11/1 17) As long as children are minors under the legal control of their parents and receiving support in the household, they are obliged to abide by parental decisions as to the amount of secular education they will receive.—*w*70 3/1 153-6.

While many public school systems tend to be inadequate and expose students to bad influences, most Christian parents, with due respect for what is required by law, send their children to **public schools for a basic education.** The parents should do all that they can at home to offset the bad influences that their children experience while attending school. (*w*76 9/1 522; *w*75 9/1 542-4; *w*70 8/1 479-80) A fundamental education can help equip a youth for shouldering adult responsibility, including qualifying for adequate employment—but more important, for carrying out Christian responsibilities. (*w*00 11/1 18-21; *w*96 2/1 9-14; *w*92 11/1 18-21; *w*82 7/15 12-13) Even limit-

ed contact with worldly students can help a youth to know how to apply Bible principles in dealing with situations that come up in life.—*yp* 134-65; *g*84 1/22 21-3; *g*84 1/8 16-18.

If parents inquire about **home schooling**, encourage them to decide what is best for their children, taking into consideration, among other things, what the law requires and whether they have the time and ability to provide adequate home schooling.—*g*93 4/8 9-12.

There are dangers that can undermine the faith and morality of those who go to **schools of higher education.** (*w*84 10/1 17; *w*82 7/15 13-15) In order to avoid these dangers, some choose to take supplementary education or training, such as a brief course at a trade school, in order to acquire needed job skills.—*w*05 10/1 26-31; *w*00 11/1 19; *w*96 2/1 14; *g*84 10/22 15.

Would an appointed brother continue to qualify for privileges in the congregation if he, his wife, or his children pursue higher education? (*w*05 10/1 27, par. 6) Much would depend on the circumstances and how he is viewed within the congregation. When such a situation arises, the body of elders should consider the following questions and scriptures: Does his life pattern show that he puts Kingdom interests first in his life? (Matt. 6:33) Does he teach his family members to put Kingdom interests first? Does he respect what has been published by the faithful slave on the dangers of higher education? (3 John 9) Do his speech and conduct reveal that

he is a spiritual person? (Ps. 1:2, 3; 1 Cor. 2:13-16) How is he viewed by the congregation? Why is he or his family pursuing higher learning? Do they have theocratic goals? (Phil. 3:8) Does the pursuit of higher learning interfere with regular meeting attendance, meaningful participation in field service, or other theocratic activities? Heavenly wisdom should guide the elders in properly and impartially evaluating these factors that could affect an appointed brother's privileges of service.—Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 5:3.

If **public school** facilities are available, Jehovah's Witnesses prefer to use such instead of sending their children to **schools operated by religions**, where the children may be exposed to religious indoctrination or be put under pressure to use religious titles. In certain countries some parents have considered the problems of immoral pressures and rampant delinquency or the low quality of education in secular schools; they have weighed such factors against possible spiritual dangers at religious schools and have decided to send their children to a school connected with a religious organization. That is a personal, family matter. A father making such a decision would not automatically be viewed as a poor example. If Christian youths attend a religious school because of choice or because such schools are the only ones available, the parents should definitely inform the school authorities that their children cannot participate in the school's religious activities. In the event that the children cannot be excused from classes of religious instruction, the

parents should regularly help their children by offsetting such instruction with Bible knowledge so that the children can maintain their spirituality.—Deut. 6: 6-9; *w*91 12/15 28-9.

Before deciding to send their children to a **boarding school**, Christian parents should carefully consider the detrimental effects that this might have on their children's spirituality. Parents who arrange for (or approve of) schooling for a child that requires it to be away from the family for an extended period may not qualify for special privileges in the congregation.—*w*97 3/15 25-8; *w*82 7/15 11-15; see ELDERS AND MINISTERIAL SERVANTS.

Whether a student wears a **school uniform** or not is a matter for parental decision.

The congregation does not organize some special class of religious instruction to utilize the **time when students may be released from school for religious instruction**. We have our regular congregation meetings. If individual parents want to make provision to have a Bible study with their children during provided release times, that is for them to work out.

If a group of **Witnesses** chooses to **operate a private school** to provide the legally required education for their children, that is a private business matter, not a congregation arrangement, and we do not encourage it. No communications regarding such schools would be read at the congregation meetings, nor would notices of such be posted in

the Kingdom Hall. Such schools are private enterprises.

Balanced counsel and comments on various specific aspects of **school activities** are found in our publications. —*w64* 9/1 533-8; *w64* 6/15 377-82; see also FLAG SALUTE AND ANTHEMS.

**Schoolteachers** may face many situations that must be resolved according to the dictates of their consciences. A Christian schoolteacher may be expected to teach evolution, give instruction concerning religious or national holidays, teach religious or patriotic songs, or supervise artwork relating to holidays. While some Christians might decline such duties, others might feel conscientiously able to perform them from a purely objective standpoint, just as though teaching the facts of history or geography. If one in such a situation decides to teach things in which he does not personally believe, it would be advisable for him to explain to the class that he is doing so because it is part of the curriculum, though he holds to differing personal beliefs. Also, a conscientious decision can be made by the Christian as to whether he will have the class share in patriotic acts or songs or not while he is present but not participating; in some cases a Christian teacher may try to arrange for another teacher to supervise the class at such times.

Jehovah's Witnesses know that God made out of one man every nation of men to dwell upon the earth and that He is not partial. (Acts 10:34; 17:26; *g98* 2/22 25-7; *g93* 8/22 3-11; *g77* 10/8 20-3; *w73* 9/1 515-18) But Jehovah's Witnesses do not try to reform this system of things, including its laws and its strong prejudices regarding race, color, or language. Witnesses themselves should practice Christian love, with no discrimination. (John 13:23, 35; 15:17; *w96* 11/15 25-7; *g84* 11/8 7-11) Where the law of the land legislates certain segregation practices, Jehovah's Witnesses do not flout such laws. Also, we take into consideration predominating local sentiments and customs. While not endorsing segregation, Jehovah's Witnesses keep foremost in mind the commission to preach the good news, not making a big issue of segregation or integration any more than Christians in the first century made an issue of slavery. (1 Cor. 7:21, 22; Philem. 10-12, 16) We realize that only God's Kingdom can bring true oneness and equality to mankind. However, even now Jehovah's Witnesses have made significant strides in overcoming prejudice and racial pride.—*g93* 8/22 9-11; *g77* 10/8 24-7.



By following balanced Bible counsel, Christians can often avoid situations that would appear to require physical acts of self-defense. The Christian will find protection, not in possessing firearms, but in 'seeking peace and pursuing it.' (1 Pet. 3:11; Prov. 15:1; 17:14; 26:17; *w84* 3/1 13-15; *w83* 7/15 23-6) **If assaulted**, a Christian can conscientiously defend himself, warding off blows or even striking a blow in self-defense to stun or incapacitate the attacker temporarily, perhaps making escape possible. (*g75* 11/22 11-14; *g75* 9/8 27-8; *w68* 6/1 345-50) If confronted by an armed robber, a Christian wisely follows Scriptural counsel and does not resist, giving up any valuables demanded. (Matt. 5:39; *w98* 12/15 21-5; *g79* 10/22 7-11) A Christian woman threatened with **rape** should resist strenuously, including screaming and physically resisting, where possible. Some have prayed aloud to Jehovah for strength.—Deut. 22:23-27; Prov. 18:10; 1 Cor. 6:18; *w03* 2/1 30-1; *g93* 3/8 6-11; *g86* 5/22 22-4; *w80* 10/15 3-7; *g74* 3/8 13-16; see also FIREARMS.

It is not in harmony with the spirit of John 13:35, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, or Isaiah 2:4 for a Christian to learn or practice karate, judo, and other **martial arts**. (*g95* 9/22 12-14; *w83* 7/15 23-5; *g75* 12/8 28-9) A Christian doing so would be disqualified as an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer if counsel is rejected. (*w84* 3/1 13-15; *w83* 7/15 23-6) Depending upon the circumstances, if a Witness publicly advocated some form of martial arts and did not respond to

counsel, the situation could be handled in line with 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15.

One who continues to participate in **exercise programs**, such as Tae-Bo, that imitate movements of the martial arts, such as Tae Kwon Do, would not qualify for special privileges unless adjustments were made. While the claim may be made that such activity is for exercise only, not for self-defense purposes, the practice sets a poor example and can tempt one to go further and get fully involved in martial arts or to use such training violently in self-defense when under pressure.

One who engages in **professional boxing** could be expelled from the Christian congregation. (*w81* 7/1 30-1) Elders would first kindly but firmly present reasons why such boxing is not compatible with being a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, the "Prince of Peace." (Isa. 9:6) This is, not an innocent sport, but one in which the objective is to hurt the opponent. A murderous spirit is often encouraged. One unduly risks his health and life and can face the possibility of becoming bloodguilty. (1 John 3:15) A Christian should cultivate the fruits of God's spirit as he endeavors to be "peaceable with all men." —Rom. 12:18; Gal. 5:22, 23.

When questions arise as to the **propriety of certain conduct between husband and wife**, it is good to indicate that it is not for the Christian congregation to direct individuals about what may or may not be done in the marriage bed. Marriage mates can be advised that in their intimate relations, as in all aspects of life, Christians ought to display kindness, love, and concern for others. Married Christians are included in the admonition to avoid “covetous sexual appetite.” (1 Thess. 4:4-8) This involves showing proper restraint even during sexual relations, not resorting to unclean acts. Christians should always have a hatred for all perverted practices—homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, oral or anal sex, and the like. (Lev. 15:24; 20:18; Ps. 97:10; Amos 5:15; Rom. 12:9; Eph. 5:3, 10-12; Col. 3:5, 6) Married couples can be urged to act in a way that leaves them with a clean conscience and that reflects their desire to see the marriage bed kept honorable and without defilement.—Heb. 13:4; *w83* 3/15 27-31; *w72* 9/15 575-6; see also FAMILY AFFAIRS.

In the case of a true **hermaphrodite**, a person born with sex organs of both genders, it is up to the individual whether to submit to an operation for the removal of the excess organs or not. In such cases, the organs of one sex usually predominate, and the organs of the other sex are rudimentary. A person who has corrective surgery so as to present himself or herself according to his or her primary biological sex can be baptized.

If an individual considers undergoing a **sex-change operation** basically to bring the appearance of the sex organs into line with what the individual emotionally and **mentally** feels himself or herself to be, that one should be advised to live in accord with the biological facts of the situation. (*w97* 6/15 18-19; *w74* 6/15 360) Mutilating the sex organs, such as having the male organ surgically removed and an artificial female organ created, does not change the facts or make the person into the opposite sex. Someone desiring to be baptized who has already undergone a mutilating operation of this sort (a transsexual) would be expected to take his or her place in life in accord with what the individual biologically is, not in accord with what the person has been mutilated to appear to be. This may even require that the person leave a “mate” to whom the person is “married,” since the mutilated one is actually (biologically) of the same sex as the “mate.”

An individual who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex, practicing **transvestism**, should be helped to see that this is Scripturally condemned and may be related to homosexuality. (Deut. 22:5; Ps. 26:4) It is a moral problem for which strong counsel is definitely needed. If the acts of the individual take on a gross aspect because of being publicly displayed, this can be reason for disfellowshipping, since such conduct can be loose, brazen conduct.—Gal. 5:19; *w73* 9/15 574-6.

For additional information on loose, brazen conduct, on uncleanness, and

## **SEXUAL CONDUCT (Cont'd)**

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on sexual conduct, see *The Watchtower* of May 15, 2008, page 27; July 15, 2006, pages 29-31; October 1, 1973, pages 592-6; September 15, 1973, pages 574-6; December 15, 1972, pages 766-8; see also CONDUCT WITH OPPOSITE SEX (SINGLE PERSONS).

The practice of spiritism may consist of divination, looking for omens, sorcery, binding others with a spell (for example, hypnotism and black magic), consulting a spirit medium or fortune-teller, and inquiring of the dead. (g00 7/22 3-8) Spiritism can also involve the use of extrasensory perception and psychic healing. Some diagnostic and treatment techniques, such as the use of a pendulum, may involve forms of spiritism. (w94 12/15 20-2) However, great care must be exercised to be sure that demonism is actually involved and that a certain technique is not merely odd or unusual. (w94 12/15 19; w82 6/15 26) The branch office is not in a position to do research and judge whether certain aspects of the numerous "treatments" used worldwide involve either spiritism or fraud. However, helpful counsel appears in our publications, so individuals can weigh what is involved and make their own personal decisions as to health treatment.—w68 12/1 712; w62 11/15 679-80.

Sound counsel to help one avoid spiritistic practices and break free from the demons can be found in our publications: **Scriptural view:** *sp* brochure; *rs* 384-9; *us* booklet; g70 6/8 5-8. **Breaking free:** g00 7/22 3-8; w87 9/1 3-10; g74 2/22 3-6; w66 12/15 739-44; w63 3/15 184-90. **Astrology:** g00 11/8 26-7; **Occult practices:** g02 1/22 25-7; g80 12/8 5-12; w74 12/1 715-16. **Use of drugs for thrills:** w73 3/15 176-81. **Certain medical practices:** w94 12/15 19-22; w87 4/15 26-9; g74 9/8 27-8; w62 11/15 677-80; see also MEDI-

CAL AND HEALTH TREATMENT. **Yoga:** w02 8/1 20-2; w83 7/15 29-30; g83 2/22 13-15; g75 2/22 27-8. **Tales of the supernatural:** w94 4/1 29-31.

Queries are often received asking for help in dealing with what is perceived as **demon harassment**. It should not automatically be assumed that the one claiming demon harassment does, in fact, have a problem with demons. The problem could be caused by some emotional, mental, or physical disturbance. (g91 10/8 7, ftn; w88 10/15 27-8; g86 9/8 4; g78 7/22 5-8; g69 6/8 16-20) Or the demons may be taking advantage of one who has emotional problems. When giving advice, allowance should be made for such factors.—w88 10/15 27-8.

While the possibility of demon harassment is not to be discounted, if an individual does not seem to be having success in overcoming what appears to be such, mention can be made of the possibility that the symptoms could indicate some physical disease or deficiency.

The fact that an individual has for some time been **harassed by the demons**, perhaps hearing voices or even being sexually tormented by them, does not necessarily mean that he or she is practicing spiritism. (Luke 4:1-13; w03 5/1 31; w94 2/1 6) The person may be the victim of demon attack. In some cases such harassment might be stopped quite quickly by getting rid of objects being used by the demons as contacts or by cutting off association with anyone

practicing spiritism, while putting forth an earnest effort to build oneself up spiritually. (Prov. 18:10; Acts 19:18, 19; Eph. 6:10-18; Jas. 4:7) In other cases, the harassment may continue for a time even though the individual is doing all that seems possible. Sometimes this is the case if a person has had a long-standing involvement with the demons. Persistent efforts to resist their harassment and to remain strong spiritually are helpful, as are the prayers of spiritually strong Christians.—Jas. 5:13-15; *w*74 12/1 715-16; *w*66 12/15 739-44.

In accord with Scriptural counsel, Christians properly pay the taxes required by the government. (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1, 6, 7; *w01 1/15 5*) “Caesar” has the right to determine what taxes will be imposed. Any Christian, though, may take advantage of all legal exemptions or provisions for appeal to which he has a right. What the government does with the tax money received is not his responsibility. He does not withhold some tax money just because the government may use part of the revenue for purposes contrary to Scriptural principles. —*w94 11/15 26-8; g86 11/8 26-7; w79 1/15 30-1; g79 3/8 27-9; w75 4/1 214-15.*

According to law, a property owner who does not pay real-estate tax may in time have his property taken over by the government in lieu of taxes. In not paying such property tax but instead letting the government take title to the property, the Christian is following a provision of the law. Any publicity, such as a newspaper article announcing an impending sale of real estate for nonpayment of taxes, would not constitute an unfavorable report of a lawless act on the part of the Christian who owned the property.

The clean Christian congregation is made up of true worshipers, who have presented their 'bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, acceptable to God.' (Rom. 12:1) The Bible does not forbid Christians to consume in moderation beverages containing alcohol, which substance can be metabolized by the body and used as a "food." But the Scriptures do condemn drunkenness. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 1 Pet. 4:3; see ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES.) Individuals who for thrills or to escape reality turn to intoxicating or addictive drugs that often defile the body and cause loss of self-control do not have a place among God's dedicated, clean people.—g86 7/22 12-16; g85 7/8 12-14; w73 6/1 336-43; w73 3/15 176-81.

When an individual asks for assistance in overcoming the tobacco habit, advice can be given based on what has been published by "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matt. 24:45-47) The individual must lean heavily upon Jehovah and really want to break the habit because of a desire to please God and to 'cleanse himself of every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God's fear.' (2 Cor. 7:1) A list of **practical things that have helped some to quit smoking** is found on pages 8 and 9 of the March 22, 2000, issue of *Awake!* (See also g98 12/8 15-17; g89 7/8 16; g81 3/8 5-14; w81 2/1 3-12; w73 8/1 453-5.) Similar advice can be given to those **addicted to drugs**. (g94 4/22 6-11; g86 7/8 15-17; g85 9/22 16-18) If the one inquiring is associated with Jehovah's Witnesses, encourage him to seek the assis-

tance of the elders in the congregation.—w96 1/15 15-16.

Accepting a drug, such as a painkilling narcotic, for medical reasons and **under the direction of a physician** is different from using drugs simply for thrills. Of course, even in medical use the possibility of addiction and resulting problems should be carefully weighed. So due consideration might be given to the availability of a medical alternative.—w78 3/15 32.

The **practice of using tobacco** involves gross uncleanness. Tobacco is unquestionably harmful to the body and is addictive. Smoking defiles the air that people around the user breathe, causing them harm. However, if a Witness used tobacco on a few occasions, one or two elders could handle this, providing appropriate Scriptural counsel and help. In such cases, an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer would not necessarily be disqualified. However, if others observing the user's conduct were stumbled and reproach resulted, he would not qualify for special privileges in the congregation. Whether that one was an adult or a minor, the elders should provide appropriate counsel and help. Any Witness who makes a practice of using tobacco should be dealt with judicially, and if unrepentant, should be removed from the congregation.—Matt. 22:39; 2 Cor. 7:1; w81 2/1 9-10; w73 6/1 338-43.

**An interested person who uses tobacco** but who, at the Kingdom Hall, does not attempt to smoke or advocate

the use of tobacco may be allowed to attend and comment at congregation meetings. (*km* 4/75 4) If such a person desires to share in the Theocratic Ministry School or in the field service or wants to get baptized, he must first break free from the tobacco habit.

If a **baptized person who for many years has not been associated** with the congregation is thought to be a tobacco user but is not bringing reproach upon or causing disturbance in the congregation, the elders need not search him out with regard to his using tobacco. (*km* 2/74 6; *km* 11/73 7) In the case of a baptized person with serious mental problems who continues to use tobacco, efforts should be put forth to prevent his obtaining it. If he nonetheless persists, the local elders can consider the facts and decide what to do.

Some claim that it is necessary to use nicotine (by smoking or chewing tobacco) for medical reasons. Such ones should be encouraged to seek other medical assistance. The use of so-called **health cigarettes** (nontobacco) is to be discouraged because it gives the wrong impression. Also, the smoke itself may be injurious as well as a cause of discomfort to others. (Phil. 2:4; *w*84 6/15 31; *g*74 7/8 30) If neither mind-bending nor addictive, the use of such cigarettes would not be a disfellowshipping offense, but the individual who continued to use them would not qualify for special privileges.

The use of a **nicotine patch or nicotine gum** to release into the body

a controlled dose of the drug as an aid in overcoming addiction is a personal choice. However, one would not qualify for baptism as long as he was using such methods, as he would still be addicted. Of course, if there are medical reasons for the use of such aids under the supervision of a doctor, see above.—*g*99 4/22 28; *w*73 6/1 336-8.

**Tobacco-related employment:** In their secular employment, Christians should strive to act in a way that is consistent with the above view regarding the use of tobacco. They do not want to foster or directly support wrong practices. Thus, a Christian would not accept **employment manufacturing tobacco products** or work as a **seller** of tobacco.—*w*99 4/15 28-30; *km* 2/74 3-6.

A **farmer** who raises tobacco would not be eligible for baptism or if baptized would not qualify to remain as an approved member of the congregation. Since the use of tobacco violates Scriptural principles of cleanness, raising and selling the addictive, harmful product is certainly wrong too.

A Christian wife of an unbeliever who raises tobacco or a Christian **employed on a farm where tobacco is raised** could Scripturally do other work not directly involved with the growing and harvesting of tobacco. The wife, for example, could faithfully care for her household duties, and a Christian employee might do work in connection with animals or other farm crops, even though tobacco is a major product of the farm. For other details regarding em-



ployment related to tobacco, such as disposing of a tobacco allotment on land, see *Kingdom Ministry* of February 1974, pages 3-6.

A Christian **store owner** who controls what is stocked and sold ought not to stock tobacco or tobacco products. To do so would be to accede to the wishes of customers simply for financial gain, though knowing that the use of tobacco is unclean, contrary to the Scriptures, and harmful to health. (2 Cor. 7:1; *km* 2/74 3-4; *w*68 9/15 573) An **employee** of a store or commercial concern **who only incidentally handles or is involved with tobacco products** would have to decide according to his own conscience whether he could continue to do so or not. If he does continue and it seriously disturbs the consciences of many or affects the reputation of the congregation, it could have a bearing on his qualifying for responsibility as an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer.—1 Tim. 3:2, 7, 10; *w*99 4/15 29.

If **in connection with imprisonment or while living under totalitarian rule** where citizens are forced at gunpoint to work on particular farms a Christian is expected to help in the **raising of tobacco**, he might ask to be assigned work that is not directly involved with the tobacco. As Daniel was able to ask for substitute food and received a changed diet, perhaps alternative work would be permitted. (Dan. 1:8, 12-15) If not, Christians would have to decide what to do, just as they would if asked

to share in other activities contrary to the Scriptures.

See also EMPLOYMENT.

While many questions may be brought up about **wedding arrangements and customs**, it is good to appreciate that those who are responsible for the wedding—in many lands, the groom and bride—are the ones to make final decisions. There are many different preferences and customs in regard to weddings. Care needs to be taken that in offering counsel, the counselor does not allow his personal feelings or preferences to surface as rules. For example, someone may feel that elaborate or special wedding apparel is not needed by Christians, yet the Bible does not speak disapprovingly of attractive, even elaborate, wedding apparel. (Ps. 45:13, 14; Jer. 2:32; Rev. 21:2) So while you, in offering counsel, may appropriately urge reasonableness in all things, what individuals will wear or do is a personal matter as long as this is not unscriptural.—Phil. 4:5; *w84* 4/15 11-12.

Regarding the **use of the Kingdom Hall for weddings**, see KINGDOM HALL.

General information about Christian weddings and **vows** can be found in the following publications: *w00* 5/1 19-22; *w97* 4/15 23-6; *w84* 4/15 10-15; *w74* 5/1 274-7; *w69* 1/15 57-61. The vows that are used and acceptable to congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses appear in the April 15, 1984, *Watchtower*, page 14, and the May 1, 1974, *Watchtower*, page 275. These vows, or modifications of them to be in accord with the local law, should be used instead of privately designed vows.

There is no need to do extensive research to try to determine what the **origin of some specific marriage custom** is. In the ancient past or in some distant location, some customs may have had a pagan or religious meaning. But what should be of particular concern is the meaning of the custom in the minds of most people today. A custom, such as the wearing of a wedding ring, that 2,000 years ago had a certain superstitious significance may not have that significance at all today but, rather, be a simple custom. (*g00* 1/8 26-7; *w72* 1/15 63) Also, remember that a certain custom, such as a bride's wearing white, may have a particular meaning in one part of the earth but an entirely different significance elsewhere. See the balanced comments in *The Watchtower* of January 15, 1969, pages 59-61.

As with other social events, if a **reception or wedding feast** is to be held, moderation should be displayed.—1 Cor. 10:31; *w00* 5/1 19-22; *w97* 4/15 24-5; *w84* 4/15 16-22; *w69* 5/1 283-6.

The individuals involved can decide whether they will hold a **wedding shower** as a social gathering at which guests are free to give gifts to the bridal couple. In your reply, offer caution about the potential problems associated with comparing gifts, fostering competition, and working a financial hardship on some.—*g77* 4/8 27-8; *w69* 5/1 285-6.

Christians must decide personally whether to attend the **wedding of a worldly acquaintance or relative**. (*w02* 5/15 28; *w74* 12/15 766-7; *w67*

12/15 762-6; *w65* 1/15 60-3) When considering what to do in this matter, the individual should give consideration to the effect on those who are endeavoring to practice true worship. (Phil. 1:10) A wedding ceremony conducted in a church or by a clergyman generally includes religious aspects. Desiring to stay as far away as possible from false religion, many Christians choose not to attend such a ceremony. (2 Cor. 6:14-17) Yet others, for family or other reasons, may conscientiously conclude that they can attend. If they do, they will need to take care that they are not drawn into acts of false worship.—John 4:24.

Brothers authorized to perform the **marriage ceremony** are encouraged to use the marriage talk outline provided by Jehovah's organization. They will find further background information on which to base their **discourse** in the following publications: *w97* 4/15 23-6; *w84* 4/15 10-15; *w77* 3/15 172-85; *g74* 5/22 3-6. The brother solemnizing a marriage should be legally qualified in the state or locality where the wedding takes place. He must conscientiously decide whether he wishes to serve in such capacity, having in mind the eligibility of the couple for marriage, the appropriateness of the occasion, and whether the bride and groom meet the Scriptural qualifications. (*w97* 4/15 24; *w84* 4/15 13-14) The one giving the wedding discourse, preferably an elder, has a serious responsibility. An elder is in the best position to ensure that the marriage is not an unequal yoking, that the couple are Scripturally free to marry,

and that they have conducted themselves honorably in courtship so as to be in a position to have a Christian marriage at the Kingdom Hall. If the speaker does not legally qualify to administer the vows, an elder who meets such legal requirements could administer the wedding vows and complete the necessary documents.—*w84* 4/15 13-14; *km* 12/81 4; *km* 5/76 8.

The Kingdom Hall is not the place to solemnize an *unequal marriage*. Further, marriage officers within the congregation should not solemnize any unequal marriage. If very unusual situations arise, these can be reviewed by the branch office to see if an exception is warranted.—*w82* 3/15 31; *km* 12/81 4.

See also MARRIAGE.

If a person commits a serious wrong and is repentant, he ought to seek the spiritual help of the elders in his congregation. He should confess the wrong and seek their prayers and spiritual aid. (Prov. 28:13; Jas. 5:13-16; *w01 6/1 30-1*) A wrongdoer may **approach an individual elder** in whom he has confidence. If the wrong is not a gross sin and the wrongdoer manifests sincere and humble repentance, that elder may be able to provide sound Scriptural advice and the needed help to strengthen the wrongdoer without a committee of elders meeting on the matter—Gal. 6:1; *w81 9/1 22-4; w77 11/15 688-92*.

If the wrong committed could be a disfellowshipping offense, the elder to whom a confession is made should report the matter to the body of elders so that a determination can be made as to the need for a hearing by a properly designated judicial committee. The elder should advise the erring one of the need to handle matters in that way. **The body of elders has the responsibility to investigate promptly all cases of serious sin** because they offer a clear threat of contamination to the cleanness of the congregation or can bring the congregation into public disrepute.—Rom. 2:21-24; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 7:11; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10.

When a judicial committee meets with a wrongdoer, they **should strive to help the individual**, sharing with him good counsel based on the Scriptures. (*w98 8/1 15-17; w92 7/1 17-19*) If a person did wrong because he lacked understanding or yielded under ex-

treme pressure but he acknowledges the wrong and sincerely wants to do what is right, loving help should be extended. Appropriate reproof may be adequate to readjust him spiritually. (Ps. 32:5; 1 John 2:1) Occasionally the judicial committee may have to meet with the wrongdoer again. This additional meeting is not to induce repentance, but it may help them to determine what his feelings and motives are. (*w81 9/1 26*) However, elders should not delay unnecessarily in taking appropriate action.—1 Cor. 5:11, 13; Titus 1:13; *w92 7/1 14-19; w77 11/15 693-8; w76 12/1 721-35*.

When a designated judicial committee arranges to meet with a wrongdoer, they **should not make up their minds ahead of time** as to how the matter is to be decided. Was the wrongdoing committed in ignorance, without a bad motive? (1 Tim. 1:13) If the wrongdoer shows genuine repentance, even doing so at the meeting itself, they should endeavor to help him, reproving him according to the need. If he proves to be hardened in his course of wrongdoing and unwilling to respond to counsel, disfellowshipping will be necessary.—Titus 1:13; *w95 1/1 27-31; w77 11/15 693-8*.

A failure to come to a committee meeting is not of itself reason for disfellowshipping. However, if the **one charged with wrongdoing does not show up at the scheduled meeting** with the designated judicial committee, they should endeavor to make arrangements for another time convenient for him. If he persistently refuses to meet

with the committee and there is clear evidence of the wrong act, such as testimony by at least two witnesses, the committee must proceed to arrive at a decision on the basis of the available evidence. So a wrongdoer cannot avoid disfellowshipping by staying away from the meeting.—Num. 16:12-14; Matt. 18:16; 1 Tim. 5:19.

If a brother committed a **serious wrong** that could be a cause for disfellowshipping but is **moved to confess it voluntarily some years later**, showing sincere repentance, good counsel might suffice. However, it would be proper to ascertain the reason why the wrong was not reported earlier. Still, help him to see the need to avoid the circumstances that might lead him into a repetition of the wrong and assist him to grow in appreciation of God's Word and the provision of the elders to help repentant wrongdoers. Regarding one who was an appointed elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer at the time of committing a serious wrong, if it was within the past few years, the matter would likely be handled by a judicial committee. In any case, he would be disqualified for special privileges.—See also ELDERS AND MINISTERIAL SERVANTS.

For cases involving violations of **neutrality**, see NEUTRALITY.

If a Witness gives evidence of mental incompetence and he commits some deed for which he could be disfellowshipped, a judicial committee should consider the facts of the case. They could weigh the extent of mental in-

competence and then decide whether some announcement should be made or even if disfellowshipping should occur. (*w88 11/15 23-4*) While compassion is to be shown, care should be exercised that individuals are not quickly excused for their wrongdoing because they have some emotional problem. Most often those with a pronounced lack of mental capacity have a general comprehension of what is right and wrong. Although there may be a basis for showing more than ordinary consideration and patience, the elders must protect the cleanness and spiritual well-being of the congregation.—1 Thess. 5:14; *w90 2/15 21-3*; *w88 11/15 21-4*; *w83 10/1 27-31*.

**Failure to associate** with the congregation, even for many years, does not relieve a Witness of responsibility to answer for serious wrongdoing. However, if one has not been associated with the congregation for years and is not known as one of Jehovah's Witnesses and does not claim to be such, the congregation elders do not need to make extensive inquiry about his conduct. They can, though, make note in the congregation file so that if he later desires to associate with the congregation, the matter can be considered to the extent necessary.

There is no set length of time a person should be disfellowshipped. Reinstatement is based on genuine repentance—when the disfellowshipped individual demonstrates that he has abandoned his sinful course and is desirous of having a good relationship with Jehovah and His organization. The elders are careful to allow sufficient

time, perhaps a year or even longer, for the disfellowshipped person to demonstrate that his profession of repentance is genuine.—2 Cor. 7:9-11; *od* 156; *w79* 11/15 31-2.

**After a person is reinstated**, he may share in field service and in time may be invited to serve as a reader at meetings, represent the congregation in prayer, and share in parts on the Theocratic Ministry School and the Service Meeting. It is not wise to be in a hurry to extend such privileges to a person who was disfellowshipped or who disassociated himself. He should be given time to grow in his appreciation for the truth and to gain the respect of the congregation in general.

There is no set length of time before an **individual who was disfellowshipped or who disassociated himself could after reinstatement be recommended** first to be a ministerial servant and later to be an elder. Good judgment on the part of the body of elders is needed. They can determine his standing with the congregation. The elders should consider, too, the effect the case had on the congregation and the possible effect at this time if he was to be appointed. Would appointment as a ministerial servant or an elder be a cause for stumbling among the brothers? In some cases where great scandal resulted, he might not be able to live it down sufficiently in his lifetime to qualify to serve as an elder. It would be a rare case for a brother involved in an adulterous remarriage to be recommended to serve in an official position. In addition to

his not being recommended as a ministerial servant or a pioneer, he should not be assigned to help with literature, accounts, magazines, attendants, or any other assignment as long as his previous wife, whom he legally but unscripturally divorced, has neither remarried nor died. (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; *w80* 9/15 31) Some who are guilty of child molestation, even if not disfellowshipped for such actions, might never qualify for special privileges in the congregation.—*w97* 1/1 26-9.

As to handling cases of wrongdoing involving minor **children**, parents bear the responsibility before God for handling the situation and should be encouraged to shoulder that responsibility. (Eph. 6:4) The congregation elders, though, are concerned and may have to take action when dedicated, baptized children carry on wrong conduct.—*w01* 10/1 13-18; *w88* 11/15 19-20; for further details, see FAMILY AFFAIRS.

**Unbaptized wrongdoers:** In a case of an **unbaptized person who has been regularly associating** with the congregation by attending meetings and perhaps sharing in the Theocratic Ministry School and who unrepentantly continues in a course of serious wrongdoing, appropriate efforts should be made by the elders to help him. Specific Scriptural counsel should be given. If this is not heeded, those with whom he closely associates can be helped privately to appreciate that he is not good association. If necessary, a brief talk can be given (without mentioning a name) that alerts the congregation to the need

to be careful about their association and the need to maintain fine conduct. The erring one should not participate in the Theocratic Ministry School or be called upon to comment at meetings. If he repeatedly causes a disturbance at meetings, he should be told that he is not welcome at our meetings.

If the one involved in serious wrongdoing is **an unbaptized publisher**, two elders will be assigned by the body of elders to meet with him. The situation would be handled in a manner similar to a judicial hearing. If he is repentant, the two elders will decide whether he continues to qualify as an unbaptized publisher and whether it is necessary to make an announcement to the congregation that the matter has been handled. If he is unrepentant, an announcement can be made that “[name of individual] is no longer recognized as an unbaptized publisher.” Association with such a person would be out of harmony with the counsel at 1 Corinthians 15:33. No field service reports would be accepted from him.—*w89* 2/15 29; *od* 157; *w88* 11/15 15-20.

As to **marrying a disfellowshipped person**, see DISFELLOWSHIPING.

When a **person appeals the decision of a judicial committee to disfellowship him**, an appeal committee will be assigned to review the facts of the case and the basis for the decision reached. If the appeal committee agrees with the judicial committee’s decision, the disfellowshipped person should be

informed and the disfellowshipping can be announced to the congregation. The appeal committee will send to the branch office both its report, giving reasons why they affirm the decision of the judicial committee, and a copy of the report from the judicial committee. On the other hand, the appeal committee may decide that in their judgment the disfellowshipping should be rescinded, and the judicial committee, after reconsideration of the case, may agree that rescinding the disfellowshipping would be proper. Each committee should write a separate report for the branch office that confirms the decision of the appeal committee, while also sending along the original S-77 reports that give details on why the judicial committee at first decided to disfellowship. The person should be told that the decision on his case is pending. If the two committees, despite weighing matters carefully and prayerfully together, differ as to what action would be appropriate, they should summarize their conclusions in separate reports for the branch office, each committee providing the other with a copy of its report. The appeal committee will forward all these documents to the branch office. Neither the judicial committee nor the appeal committee should give any intimation of their decisions to the individual. Whatever the final decision, the original judicial committee will inform the person involved.

While there should not be hasty action in reinstating individuals, neither should there be delay in reinstating

when repentance is definitely shown. If the designated **judicial committee of the original congregation declines to reinstate a disfellowshipped person** and that one appeals to the branch office and gives evidence of perhaps being in a position to be reinstated, the branch office can write to the local committee about their reasons for the position they take about showing mercy. (Jas. 3:17) Where, over a period of time, the effort of the branch office to help the local elders to reflect balance brings no result, a special committee can be designated to look into the matter and handle the reinstatement if that is decided upon. This extreme action would be necessary only in an unusual case and where the facts clearly point to reinstatement.



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