

**“PAY ATTENTION
TO YOURSELVES
AND TO
ALL THE FLOCK”**

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ACTS 20:28**

**Kingdom Ministry School
Textbook**

A copy of this textbook is issued to each appointed elder, and he may retain it as long as he continues to serve as an elder in any congregation. At such time as he should cease to serve in that capacity, his copy of the book must be handed over to the Congregation Service Committee, since this publication is congregation property. No copies are to be made of any part of this publication.

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"Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock"

English (ks9l-E)

Made in the United States of America

Kingdom Ministry School Course

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The Purpose of the Textbook

The revised edition of *“Pay Attention to Yourself and to All the Flock”* is presented as a practical and convenient handbook for congregation elders and traveling overseers to use in caring for responsibilities as shepherds of the flock of God.—Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2.

As appointed elders and Christian overseers, you have been given the responsibility to ensure that the flock is well fed. (Compare John 21:15-17.) Among other things, this calls for teaching the congregation as a whole through instructive meetings. It also involves appropriate teaching on a personal basis to enlighten, give counsel, exhort, and reprove. Improving your ability as teachers is given special consideration in this publication.

Another important part of an overseer’s work involves taking the lead in field service. Therefore, emphasis is placed on your regular participation in the public ministry and on how you can help others to have a meaningful share.

With so many outside pressures bearing on the brothers, you are often faced with matters involving counsel and judgment. How can you be sure that you are viewing matters from Jehovah’s standpoint? When judging cases that come to your attention, how can you be balanced in showing loving concern for the brothers involved while making sure that Jehovah’s righteousness is upheld? This publication gives these matters careful consideration.

Material from the three original segments of *“Pay Attention to Yourself and to All the Flock,”* published in 1977, 1979, and 1981, has been combined and updated. The outline presentation of the information has been retained. This facilitates locating particular points that you may need to find quickly. Thus the book will continue to serve as a handbook to be used in connection with elders’ meetings, judicial matters, and the periodically conducted Kingdom Ministry School.

The wide margins and other blank spaces and pages have been provided so that you can make appropriate notes for your personal use and can add references as related information is published or otherwise brought to your attention. If it should become necessary to make substantial revisions at a future date, the Society will issue revised information on individual pages that can be conveniently inserted, thus keeping the information in the book up-to-date.

We are confident that you greatly appreciate your privilege of serving Jehovah’s people as undershepherds of God’s flock. Your life is filled with many responsibilities; you are also subject to many pressures. On the other hand, you receive many blessings and much joy. May you find the information in this handbook to be helpful in caring for your assigned duties. And may your faithful service continue to bring refreshment and strength to the flock of God, your brothers.—Isa. 32:2.

Train all the brothers and sisters to take the initiative in approaching new ones and getting acquainted with them.

So that you may encourage and help others, be sure to arrive at the meetings early and stay for a while after the program.

You can associate with new ones at other times also, perhaps visiting with them in their home or yours.

Such personal interest lets them see that genuine love exists among Jehovah's people. (John 13:35)

It also fills the void created when they cut off former associations and worldly entertainment.

Young members of the congregation need to be strengthened to resist "the desires incidental to youth." (2 Tim. 2:22)

Parents have the primary responsibility to care for the needs of their children. (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21)

However, the young ones are a part of the congregation, and elders have a responsibility toward them also and should show genuine interest in them.

Why is knowing the full names of all the youth in your congregation helpful?

Many youths do not have a father or a mother in the truth, and some have no relatives in the truth.

They deserve the consideration that is to be shown to "the fatherless boy." (Job 29:12; Jas. 1:27)

EXPERIENCE: One teenager was given attention by an elder. He would pick the boy up every time he was going to help with the building of the Kingdom Hall. Each day after they finished their work on the hall, they would go to get some refreshments and take time to converse. The boy grew up and became a circuit overseer. He remembered this elder's concern as a major factor in his spiritual development.

Take note of ways that you and others can assist and encourage young ones in the congregation, and continually assure them of your interest.

Seek them out to engage them in conversation at the Kingdom Hall and elsewhere.

Encourage them to express themselves.

Eagerly listen to their viewpoints and their problems; be slow to criticize, quick to commend.

Help young ones build confidence in Jehovah, and help them to esteem highly the privilege of being Jehovah's Witnesses. (*w85 8/15 pp. 11-21*)

Develop helpful interest in their schooling.

Show a keen concern for youth who have difficulty adjusting to adulthood.

Make them feel wanted and needed in the congregation.

Help them to see how they can be helpful and encouraging to others by their presence and participation at the meetings and in the field service.

Use ingenuity in devising assignments for exemplary ones, such as using them to assist with roving microphones, tidy up the restrooms after each meeting, and straighten up the chairs.

List some responsibilities appropriate to your congregation.

Suggest attainable goals for them, such as weekly participation in field service or commenting at every meeting.

Talk with them about pioneer work, Bethel and missionary service, auxiliary pioneering, and so forth.

Work with them in the field service.

Help them to make progress in various features of this activity, such as in filling out house-to-house record slips, organizing their book bags, and learning how to make return visits and start Bible studies.

Examine what is being done to encourage and assist young ones in your congregation.

Pioneers need encouragement and help in many ways.

Make a periodic check to see what encouragement pioneers need, and assist them in practical ways.

Are meetings for field service begun and ended on time?

UNIT 4 (a)

How the Elders Work Together as a Body

“In the multitude of counselors there is accomplishment,” states Proverbs 15:22. A congregation having a body of older men who work closely together is indeed blessed. But what is the key to their being able to work in unity? Primarily, it is their recognizing Jesus Christ as Head of the Christian congregation.

When elders meet together, Christ’s headship should dominate. (1 Cor. 11:3) Their meetings should be well arranged. (1 Cor. 14:40) They should try to reach decisions on matters discussed. Definite arrangements should be made for someone to follow through on the decisions that are made. How can the presiding overseer conduct meaningful elders’ meetings? What must each individual elder do to make a positive contribution to these meetings? But first, what is involved in recognizing Christ’s headship, and how does this unite a body of elders?

Recognizing the Headship of Christ Unites the Body

Although Jehovah God is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, he has appointed Jesus Christ as Head of the Christian congregation. (Eph. 1:22, 23; 1 Pet. 2:25)

By genuinely accepting Jesus Christ as Head of the Christian congregation, elders will be motivated to do the following:

Let the Bible be the guide in making decisions. (John 7:16, 17)

Respect information and direction coming from agencies used by “the faithful and discreet slave.” (Matt. 24:45-47)

Treat the congregation as God’s inheritance, not lord-
ing it over them. (1 Pet. 5:1-3)

Avoid imposing personal viewpoints, opinions, or arbitrary rules on the congregation or the body of elders.

Deal in a kind and loving manner regarding each individual in the congregation. (Matt. 11:28-30; John 21:15-17)

Listen carefully to the expressions of fellow elders. (Matt. 18:20; Rom. 12:10b)

Pray when a discussion among elders seems to falter.

(For additional information, see *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1986, pages 10-20.)

Jesus Christ controls all bodies of elders. At Revelation 1:20 they are likened to seven stars upon his right hand. (re pp. 28-9)

Jesus, by means of God's holy spirit, can influence *any* elder on the body to provide the Bible-based suggestions needed for any given situation. (Matt. 18:20; Acts 15:13-17)

By accepting this fact, elders will be helped to work together as a body.

Each elder should listen carefully to the Scriptural suggestions of the other elders.

We should not make an independent decision for the congregation if a matter is one on which we should consult other elders.

What Enables Elders to Display the Spirit of Cooperation

Jehovah, through his Son, unifies the congregation for harmonious cooperation. (Eph. 4:16; compare Romans 8:28.)

Elders are really cooperating with Jehovah when they cooperate as a body for the good of the congregation. (Col. 2:19; 1 Cor. 12)

Cooperation is a result of displaying the fruitage of the spirit, which every elder should cultivate in his personal life, both publicly and privately. (Gal. 5:22, 23)

In the following ways, elders show that they are cooperating together and striving to maintain the unity referred to at Psalm 133:1:

Keeping communication among elders open and free, especially if there are differences in background.

Sharing pertinent information with fellow elders.

Not shielding elders or their relatives from needed counsel.

Seeking assistance and suggestions from elders who have much experience.

Not campaigning among fellow elders to undermine decisions of the body that do not meet personal preference.

Accepting fellow elders' excellent qualities, as well as their limited abilities.

Not finding fault with fellow elders as they are learning new duties.

Making sure that reports and records that other elders need to refer to are available and up-to-date.

Promptly following through to completion on assignments given by the body.

It should be possible for bodies of elders to be *unanimous* in most of their decisions. (Acts 15:25)

If *Bible principles* are involved, the elders should make their decision in harmony with these.

When there is counsel from the faithful and discreet slave on the matter, either by letter or from the Society's publications, the elders will want to take that counsel to heart. (Matt. 24:45)

Other matters may generally be decided by the majority of the elders on the basis of their sound judgment and of their concern for providing the best guidance and direction for the congregation.

Even the majority should not insist on a personal viewpoint if such does not take into consideration

Scriptural principles and the peace, unity, and spiritual welfare of all members of the congregation.

At Romans 12:10, Paul exhorts: “In showing honor to one another take the lead.”

If elders honor one another, they will not insist that their personal viewpoints be adopted when matters are discussed.

Individual elders will cooperate closely with what the *body of elders as a whole* determines is in the best interests of the congregation.

If the majority decide that a matter should be handled in a certain way, then the minority should give willing support to such a decision.

However, if those in the minority have a Bible reference and comments in print on the matter from the faithful and discreet slave, the majority should recognize such corrective information so that a Bible-based decision can be reached.

If in the opinion of the minority a Bible-based decision is still not reached, the minority should continue to cooperate with the rest of the body and bring the matter to the attention of the circuit overseer during his regular visit.

The congregation will cooperate if they sense that all the elders base their decisions on God’s Word. (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17)

Working Together as a Body of Elders

Working together as a body does not mean that all share in performing each task or making each decision.

Individual members of the human body carry out certain functions without direct participation by other body members. (1 Cor. 12:12-31)

Honoring one another, elders will allow the presiding overseer and other assigned elders the initiative to make decisions that will enable them to carry out their respective responsibilities.

Consider the following examples of decisions that individual elders may make without always consulting with other elders.

Weekly announcements made to the congregation. Items posted on the information board. Service Meeting assignments. (presiding overseer)

Organization of congregation files. General letters of introduction and transfer of records when publishers move. (secretary)

Magazine order changes. (service overseer)

Good communication and close cooperation are necessary among the elders themselves as well as in their relationship with the ministerial servants.

Be ready to offer helpful suggestions and to listen to thoughtful recommendations.

Genuinely honoring one another sets a fine example and serves as a good influence on the congregation.

It promotes peace and encourages all to work with greater enthusiasm and happiness.

Discouragement will be diminished. (Prov. 24:10)

When Elders' Meetings May Be Held

Meetings are held each year in conjunction with visits of the circuit overseer.

Three months after each visit of the circuit overseer, a meeting can be scheduled. (*om* p. 42)

Other meetings should be arranged at any time that circumstances necessitate.

Keep additional meetings limited to their purposed objectives.

If elders do not become bogged down with unnecessary meetings, they will have more time for their family, for field service activities, and for shepherding the congregation. (Matt. 24:14; 1 Tim. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:2)

How the Presiding Overseer Can Prepare for Elders' Meetings

Romans 12:8 says, "He that presides, let him do it in real earnest."

The presiding overseer *compiles an agenda* of matters that need discussion by the whole body of elders.

He contacts the other elders individually beforehand to determine what matters they feel need to be added to the agenda and discussed.

If practical, in harmony with Proverbs 21:5, he gives a copy of the agenda to each elder far enough in advance of the meeting to allow him to give the points due thought. (1 Cor. 14:40)

In some cases the elder who recommended an item for the agenda may be asked to take the lead in presenting it for discussion.

Letting the brother know ahead of time will give him opportunity to prepare a clear presentation of the facts.

Diligent preparation will keep the length of elders' meetings to a minimum, allowing more time for other essentials.

How You Can Prepare for Elders' Meetings

When you receive the agenda prepared by the presiding overseer, you should give careful and prayerful thought to each point itemized.

Listed below are some questions that each elder may want to ponder in connection with major items on the agenda:

How did this situation come about?

What Scriptural principles should guide us in deciding what to do?

What direction has been provided by the faithful and discreet slave?

There is need to do research in the Society's publications. (Where available, use the *Watch Tower Publications Indexes*.)

Is there more that I can do to deal effectively with this matter?

In what way can the entire body of elders improve its handling of this matter?

Should this suggestion be put into operation? Why?

What Matters Might Be Included on the Agenda for Elders' Meetings

Spiritual matters should be of principal concern. (Phil. 1:9-11)

Appropriate ideas can be obtained by thinking on the shepherding counsel found in the letters to Timothy and Titus and in such passages as Acts 20:17-35 and 1 Peter 5:1-11.

Time may be allowed on the agenda for matters of a mechanical, nonspiritual nature also.

These should be discussed only when they involve problems that an individual elder, the building committee, or the maintenance committee cannot care for on their own initiative.

Make Meaningful Expressions During Your Elders' Meetings

The presiding overseer should set the pace of the discussion by keeping the main points to the fore; keep to the agenda.

Conclude each matter before another is opened for discussion so that the meeting does not bog down or ramble.

Make sure that either you or another elder takes notes as to decisions made and who will carry them out.

Applying the Scriptural principles embodied in the following will result in more productive elders' meetings:

Speak on the points under discussion only when you have something meaningful to add. (Prov. 10:19)

There should be no wrath or debates evident in elders' meetings. (1 Tim. 2:8)

Speak up, use "freeness of speech." Much time can be wasted if there are long pauses due to a hesitancy to speak. (1 Tim. 3:13)

See the listing at the end of this unit. In it are some items that you may wish to include on an agenda for consideration by the elders in your congregation.

(For more information, see *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1988, pages 15-20, and August 1, 1975, pages 471-4.)

Presiding Overseer

The presiding overseer is appointed by the Society for an indefinite period of time. He serves as chairman of the body of elders. He should be a kindly, loyal man with experience in handling congregation matters. He must be orderly and diligent, not a procrastinator in caring for responsibilities. (1 Tim. 3:2)

His duties include the following:

Serves as chairman of the body of elders at their meetings.

Receives congregation mail and passes it along to the secretary for circulation and filing.

Signs most correspondence sent to the Society.

Compiles Scriptural and practical agendas outlining points for discussion at regular elders' meetings throughout the year. May suggest points for elders' meetings during the visit of the circuit overseer.

Seeks to distinguish between items that can be handled by individual elders and those needing attention by the

entire body of elders, so as to avoid unnecessarily taking the time of the entire body.

Makes sure that there is appropriate follow-through on decisions made by elders.

Modestly seeks and accepts suggestions from other elders.

Arranges for monthly Service Meeting schedule, and makes sure of appropriate rehearsals of demonstrations, interviews, and so forth.

May ask other elders to assist.

Arranges for public talks.

Might be assisted by another elder or a well-qualified ministerial servant, if needed.

Approves all announcements made to the congregation, especially those of a judicial nature.

Takes the lead in caring for details in preparation for the circuit overseer's visit.

Serves as chairman of the service committee when considering regular or auxiliary pioneer applications, unassigned territory applications, or similar matters as required by the Society.

Calls a meeting of the body of elders when judicial matters arise. (See Unit 5 (b), pages 108-10.)

Arranges for two elders to meet with each person desiring to become a new publisher. The publisher conducting the study is included in the meeting. (*w88* 11/15 p. 17)

Arranges for elders to consider questions with baptismal candidates.

Arranges for quarterly audit of congregation accounts.

Makes certain there is a written record of such and that an appropriate announcement regarding the audit is made to the congregation.

Authorizes payment of all normal operating expenses of the congregation.

Recommendation for appointment of the presiding overseer is submitted in conjunction with the regular visit of the circuit overseer.

If a temporary adjustment is made apart from the circuit overseer's visit, the Society should be notified immediately by letter signed by the service committee on behalf of the body of elders.

The Presiding Overseer Change of Address form (S-29) should accompany the letter.

Congregation Secretary

Sees to it that correspondence received by the congregation and the body of elders from the Society and others is attended to promptly and proper response is made when necessary.

The secretary's duties include the following:

Maintains the vital congregation records in an orderly way.

Circulates among the elders all letters from the Society and traveling overseers and then files them for reference.

Keeps records concerning Kingdom Hall ownership, legal corporation, loans, insurance, deeds, and other documents.

Files records on disciplinary cases, including reports made up by the judicial committees. (See Unit 5 (c), page 122.)

Keeps a diary of business items that elders or congregation must handle in the future, such as utility bills and tax and government items.

Sends orders to the branch office; sends reports promptly; sends communications prepared by other brothers.

Keeps Congregation's Publisher Record cards; compiles field service reports.

Gives report to Congregation Book Study conductors as to who is irregular in field service.

Sends Congregation's Publisher Record card to congregation to which a publisher moves or initiates correspondence if a publisher moves into his congregation. (*km* 2/91 p. 7)

Secretary will personally care for these duties.

If necessary, an elder or a capable ministerial servant may be assigned to assist in caring for some routine matters.

Service Overseer

As evangelizer and teacher, the service overseer is keenly interested in his fellow servants. He is one who loves the field ministry and is capable and alert to train others. He is respected in the congregation as one who takes the lead in the field and who has demonstrated his effectiveness in various aspects of the field ministry.

The service overseer's duties include the following:

Schedules regular visits to all Congregation Book Study groups, so that once each month he visits a different group. (In smaller congregations with perhaps only one or two book studies, he may arrange to visit each one twice during the year.)

Following a 45-minute book study, he will give a 15-minute service talk.

On that weekend he will work with the group in the field ministry from house to house and help publishers with their return visits and Bible studies.

Other weeks of the month are spent with the group where he is assigned along with his family. (*km* 6/90 p. 7)

Takes the lead in arranging meetings for field service at convenient times during weekdays; he is alert to organize witnessing on holidays.

Shows genuine interest in Bible Study activity, making sure that effective studies are being conducted and that students are being directed to the organization.

Takes keen interest in irregular and inactive publishers living in the congregation territory and works along with the body of elders in providing spiritual assistance toward recovery. (*km* 4/82 p. 3)

Directly oversees the work of ministerial servants assigned to handle literature, magazines, and territory.

Congregation Service Committee

Comprises the presiding overseer, the secretary, and the service overseer. (*om* p. 43)

The duties of the Congregation Service Committee involve the following:

Signing correspondence regarding appointment or deletion of elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers.

They process applications for auxiliary and regular pioneer work, for Bethel service, and for other special service privileges.

If one member is absent, another elder may be asked to substitute in order to expedite matters.

May be called on by the Society for other designated work as needed.

One member of the service committee is included in the meeting with each Bible student desirous of becoming an unbaptized publisher. (*w88* 11/15 p. 17)

The *Watchtower* Study Conductor and the Theocratic Ministry School Overseer

The *Watchtower* Study conductor and the Theocratic Ministry School overseer conduct their respective meetings in harmony with counsel from the organization as outlined in *Organized to Accomplish Our Ministry, Our Kingdom Ministry*, other special instructions, and this textbook.

It is important that these brothers prepare diligently and use effective teaching methods, since these meetings are primary provisions of the faithful slave to give vital instruction to the congregation.

The *Watchtower* Study conductor and the Theocratic Ministry School overseer should set an outstanding example as zealous ministers of the good news, working regularly with the publishers in the field service.

In the absence of either of these brothers, a qualified elder may be asked to conduct the meeting.

Circuit Overseer's Visit

The schedule of the circuit overseer has been arranged to be beneficial to the congregation. There may be a need to adjust this schedule when several congregations use the same Kingdom Hall or when other local circumstances would make an adjustment advisable.

Tuesday evening at the Kingdom Hall.

The Theocratic Ministry School will be 30 minutes in length, followed by a Service Meeting of 30 minutes.

The circuit overseer will then present a 30-minute closing service talk.

Thursday (or *Friday*) evening at the Kingdom Hall.

One combined Congregation Book Study.

A designated elder will conduct the study and endeavor to cover the assigned portion for that week in 45 minutes.

This will be followed by "Continue in the Things That You Learned," a 30-minute feature with audience participation, conducted by the circuit overseer.

The circuit overseer will then give a concluding 30-minute service talk. (*km* 5/90 p. 2)

Sunday at the Kingdom Hall.

The circuit overseer will give the public talk, usually 45 minutes in length.

This will be followed by a 30-minute *Watchtower* Study, without the reading of paragraphs.

Finally, the circuit overseer will present his concluding remarks for 30 minutes.

Elders should exhibit an enthusiastic spirit before and during the circuit overseer's visit.

Elders should allow the circuit overseer's visit to infuse them with renewed vigor to carry out their responsibilities and should help stimulate the congregation to greater activity and faithfulness.

Suggestions for Agendas Used for Elders' Meetings

Overall spirit of the congregation.

Is love manifest by warmth among the brothers?

Is there a joyful spirit?

Are hospitality and friendliness being exhibited?

Do the friends get together for mutual encouragement at times other than at meetings?

Is there freedom from class distinctions?

Do the teenagers and young adults feel accepted?

Do the elderly display cheerfulness because of receiving kindly attention?

Are the elders helpful in cases of need?

Do the publishers show a readiness to help one another in cases of illness or accident, or under other circumstances?

Are the brothers taking the truth seriously as a way of life?

Is there a healthy pioneer spirit?

Do the publishers show a spirit of willingness to work together in field service?

Being well acquainted with the flock.

What individuals or families need encouragement?

Have there been any deaths in the families of publishers?

Who are the new ones, and how are they progressing?

UNIT 5 (a)

Overseers 'Ruling for Justice Itself'

Jehovah, as a loving Shepherd, has directed overseers to “rule as princes for justice itself.” (Isa. 32:1, 2) Since Jehovah God is holy, he requires that all those who worship him be spiritually and morally clean. (1 Pet. 1:14-16) As appointed overseers, you have a large part in safeguarding the cleanness of the congregation.

Protective care is a basic idea embraced in the word “overseer” (*e·pi'sko-pos*), which carries also the thought of one who watches over, a guardian, a shepherd of the flock. You have the responsibility to cultivate in the hearts of the brothers a love for what is good and a hatred for what is bad, wicked. (Rom. 12:9) By holding to God's Word and by effectively using the art of teaching, you will be able to help your brothers not only to understand what is right and what is wrong but also to have an active part in keeping the congregation clean and chaste for public service to Jehovah.

How Elders Promote Justice

All elders are responsible to shepherd the flock, to teach, reprove, reprimand, and exhort as necessary. (Titus 1: 9-14)

When teaching, state clearly what God requires, and encourage faithful adherence to his righteous principles.

Help fellow believers to appreciate their responsibility to keep the congregation clean.

Assist them to understand that this involves:

Keeping their own personal conduct chaste.

Listening to their Bible-trained conscience.

Relentlessly resisting temptations.

Refusing to feed their minds on immoral ideas; perceiving how wrong thoughts lead to wrong actions.

Parents' instilling moral character in their children.

Younger ones' obeying their parents.

Refusing to imitate the world and its unscriptural ways.

Teaching interested persons the Bible's high moral standards.

Set a fine example yourself in attitude, conduct, and speech so that the congregation can imitate your faith. (Heb. 13:7)

Display the traits of a spiritual man; do not give way to unclean practices of a physical man. (1 Cor. 2:14, 15)

Your example will help your brothers to have "the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16)

Take the initiative to help anyone in the congregation who has taken some false step; do your best to readjust him. (Gal. 6:1)

Encourage good associations; warn the brothers to guard against bad associations both inside and outside the congregation. (1 Cor. 15:33)

Yet, do not create ill will toward a weak one in the congregation who is being helped.

Some may not yet have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish right and wrong. (Heb. 5:14)

Keep watch over their souls, since you will render an account for them too. (Heb. 13:17)

Discern the difference between a weak person and a wicked person.

Deal with your brothers as Jehovah would deal with them. (Eph. 5:1)

Always give them direction from God's Word; avoid giving your own opinions. (2 Tim. 4:2)

Be just yet kind in all your dealings. (Mic. 6:8)

Manifest humility by showing empathy, since you are also a mere human made of dust. (Ps. 103:13, 14)

Act as qualified judges.

Keep the spirit of the world out of the congregation. (1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 2:1, 2)

Reprove and readjust wrongdoers. (Titus 1:9)

Remove unrepentant wrongdoers. (1 Cor. 5:7, 13)

Uphold Jehovah's Righteousness

Wrongdoing is increasing in frequency and in depravity; such can infiltrate and affect the Christian congregation. (2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13; Jude 3, 4, 11-13)

The Scriptures clearly show that Jehovah forbids certain conduct among his clean people; brothers need to uphold Jehovah's righteous standards regarding the following:

Manslaughter.

A degree of guilt could result from careless driving, careless maintenance of one's automobile, or other careless or thoughtless action that causes injury or death. (Compare Deuteronomy 22:8.)

Being a professional boxer may be viewed in a similar way. (*w*81 7/1 pp. 30-1)

Attempted suicide may be the result of deep despair or major depression; deal carefully and compassionately with such a person. In most cases a judicial hearing is not required. (Ps. 88:3, 17, 18; Prov. 15:13; Eccl. 7:7; *g*90 9/8 pp. 22-3; *w*90 3/15 pp. 26-30; *w*90 3/1 pp. 5-9; *w*83 8/1 pp. 3-11)

Sexual misconduct, including adultery, fornication, and other forms of "por-nei'a."

Uncleanness includes an intentional momentary touching of sexual parts or caressing of breasts. (1 Thess. 4:7, 8; 1 Tim. 5:1, 2)

Such minor uncleanness can be handled at the discretion of an elder or two; it does not require a judicial hearing.

There is a need for strong counsel, admonition, and assistance to help the individual to maintain chaste conduct in the future.

If not corrected, such conduct may escalate in gravity and by frequent repetition become loose conduct.

Loose conduct is a shocking, flagrant disregard for Jehovah's moral standards. (Gal. 5:19; *w*83 3/15 p. 31; *w*73 9/15 pp. 574-6)

It may include the willful practice of heavy petting or the fondling of breasts.

The nature, circumstances, and actual extent of what has occurred may indicate loose conduct, which would require judicial action.

Such practices can easily lead to *por-nei'a*.

"*Por-nei'a*" involves immoral use of the genitals of at least one human (whether in a natural or a perverted way), and there must have been another party to the immorality—a human of either sex or a beast; willing participation incurs guilt and requires judicial action. It is not a casual touching of the sex organs between persons but involves the manipulation of the genitals. (*w*83 6/1 pp. 23-6; *w*83 3/15 pp. 30-1)

It includes oral and anal sex or mutual masturbation between persons not married to each other, homosexuality, lesbianism, fornication, adultery, incest, and bestiality. (Lev. 20:10, 13, 15, 16; Rom. 1:24, 26, 27, 32; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10)

Also included are sexual abuse of children, including practices involving a catamite (a boy kept for purposes of sexual perversion). (Deut. 23:17, 18, *Ref. Bi.*, ftns.)

Victims of sexual abuse need to be treated with extreme thoughtfulness and kindness. Elders should always do what they reasonably can to protect children from further abuse; follow the Society's directives on such matters. (*g*85 1/22 p. 8)

Self-abuse, or masturbation, is *not* “*por-nei’a*,” nor would one who was raped be guilty of *por-nei’a*. (*w*83 3/15 p. 30; *w*74 3/1 p. 160; *it*-1 pp. 862-4; *tp* p. 144)

The term *por-nei’a* lays emphasis on both the lewd nature and the intent of the person’s conduct, and it embraces all illicit sexual activity characteristic of that found in a house of prostitution.

Copulation (as in penetration) is not necessary to constitute *por-nei’a*, and neither is sexual climax.

In borderline cases, it is the responsibility of the judicial committee to weigh carefully the Scriptures and the particular facts in the case to determine whether *por-nei’a* was involved.

This responsibility should not be taken lightly, especially when Scriptural freedom to remarry is involved. (Mal. 2:16a)

Apostasy.

Apostasy is a standing away from, a falling away, defection, rebellion, abandonment; it involves teaching false doctrines, supporting or promoting false religion and its holidays or interfaith activities. (Deut. 13:13, 15; Josh. 22:22, ftn.; Acts 21:21, ftn.; 2 Cor. 6:14, 15, 17, 18; 2 John 7, 9, 10; Rev. 18:4)

Those with sincere doubts should be helped, dealt with mercifully. (Jude 22, 23; *w*82 9/1 pp. 20-1; *w*80 8/1 pp. 21-2)

Apostasy includes action taken against true worship of Jehovah or his established order among his dedicated people. (Jer. 17:13; 23:15; 28:15, 16; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10)

Persons who deliberately spread (stubbornly hold to and speak about) teachings contrary to Bible truth as taught by Jehovah’s Witnesses are apostates.

If it is learned that a person has taken up association with another religious organization, the matter should be investigated, and if verified, a committee should be formed.

If it is clearly established that the person has joined another religion and intends to remain with it, the

elders would make a brief announcement to the congregation that such one has disassociated himself. (*w86* 10/15 p. 31)

Working secularly for a false religious organization could put one in a position similar to that of one preaching false doctrine. (2 Cor. 6:14-16)

Celebrating a false religious holiday would be similar to performing any other act of false worship. (Jer. 7:16-19)

The Bible condemns the following:

Causing divisions and promoting sects.

This would be deliberate action disrupting the unity of the congregation or undermining the confidence of the brothers in Jehovah's arrangement.

It may involve or lead to apostasy. (Rom. 16:17, 18; Titus 3:10, 11)

The practice of spiritism. (Deut. 18:9-13; 1 Cor. 10:21, 22; Gal. 5:20)

Idolatry. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 10:14)

Idolatry includes the possession and use of images and pictures that are employed in false religion.

Drunkenness. (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9, 10; *it-1* p. 656)

Stealing, thievery, fraud. (Lev. 6:2, 4; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 4:28; *it-1* p. 870)

Deliberate, malicious lying; bearing false witness. (Prov. 6:16, 19; Col. 3:9; Rev. 22:15; *it-2* pp. 244-5)

Reviling, slander. (Lev. 19:16; 1 Cor. 6:10; *it-1* pp. 989-91; *it-2* pp. 801-2)

Obscene speech. (Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:8)

Failure to abstain from blood. (Gen. 9:4; Acts 15:20, 28, 29)

Greed—gambling, extortion. (1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:8; *it-1* pp. 1005-6)

Adamant refusal to provide materially for one's own family—leaving wife and children destitute when having the

means to provide. (1 Tim. 5:8; *w*88 11/1 pp. 22-3; *km* 9/73 p. 8)

Nonneutral activities. (Isa. 2:4; John 6:15; 17:16)

Fits of anger, violence. (Prov. 22:24, 25; Mal. 2:16; Gal. 5:20)

Misuse of tobacco or addictive drugs. (2 Cor. 7:1; Mark 15:23; Rev. 21:8, *Int.*; 22:15, *Int.*)

Loose conduct. Term not restricted to sexual immorality. (Gal. 5:19, *Ref. Bi.*, ftn.; 2 Pet. 2:7, *Ref. Bi.*, ftn.; *w*83 3/15 p. 31; *w*73 9/15 pp. 574-6; *it-2* p. 264)

SUMMARY: There are varying degrees of wrongdoing. At times there may have been an overlapping of sins, and this must be discerned in order to determine the proper Scriptural view of a person's conduct. In all cases, elders should carefully weigh each situation or circumstance. They need to find out what actually occurred, the extent and nature of misconduct, intent and motive, frequency or practice, and so forth. Good judgment, reasonableness, and balance are necessary as elders assess conduct in the light of the Scriptures.

Your Aim Should Be to Help the Person

We want to help individuals to stay within Jehovah's spiritual paradise.

When elders are approachable and display a genuine interest in the spiritual welfare of the congregation, they will keep themselves informed and alert to any special needs within the congregation.

In some cases an erring individual will come to the elders voluntarily, seeking aid and confessing his wrongdoing. (Prov. 28:13)

If the person is guilty of serious wrongdoing, it is wise for him to speak to one or more of the elders about the matter. (Jas. 5:16)

For gross sins committed, a judicial committee should be formed.

In other cases an accusation may be brought against a member of the congregation. (1 Cor. 1:11)

If a person has definite knowledge of wrongdoing that could contaminate the congregation, he is obligated to report the matter in order to keep the congregation clean. (Lev. 5:1; Num. 15:32-34; Prov. 29:24)

A judicial committee is not automatically formed even when a person is accused of serious sin.

Some matters may be handled by the elder who hears of the wrongdoing. (Gal. 6:1)

Although you may feel that your counsel will suffice to restore the individual, it is advisable to inform the presiding overseer of the matter; there may be other factors involved.

The matter may have come up before, or there may have been other acts of wrongdoing concerning which he has knowledge.

Some matters may be investigated and handled by two elders assigned by the body of elders.

There are certain cases that the body of elders is responsible to investigate and, when necessary, appoint a judicial committee to handle:

Gross sins—either those that have brought the congregation into public disrepute or those of a more private nature. (Rom. 2:21-24; 1 Cor. 5:1; 2 Cor. 7:11)

Any serious sin that constitutes a clear threat of contaminating the congregation. (1 Cor. 5:6, 9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10)

When an elder or a ministerial servant commits a gross wrong, he is morally obligated to inform the body of elders of his being reprehensible.

He would not qualify to continue in his appointed position of service.

The same would be true concerning a pioneer who becomes involved in serious sin.

Elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers should be irreprehensible and serve with a clean conscience. (1 Tim. 3:2, 8, 9; Titus 1:6)

Baptized minors.

When a baptized minor becomes involved in wrongdoing that threatens the cleanness of the congregation, the assigned committee should meet with such individual just as they would with any other member of the congregation.

It would be best to meet with the youth and his or her Christian parents; the parents have the responsibility to raise him and train him.

Try to restore the individual, if this is possible. (Gal. 6:1, fn.)

If efforts to restore bring no response, disfellowshipping is in order.

When minors are disfellowshipped, parents are still responsible for raising, training, and teaching them, even studying with them if the minors are in their home. (w88 11/15 p. 20)

Married people.

If the wrongdoer is a married woman, it would be best to meet with her and her believing husband.

He is her head, and his efforts to restore her and direct her can be very helpful.

If there is no response to efforts to bring about repentance, the wrongdoer should be disfellowshipped. (w81 9/1 pp. 22-7)

The disfellowshipping of a mate does not end marriage responsibilities.

Unbaptized publishers.

Unbaptized publishers who engage in serious wrongdoing may be readjusted.

Two elders will talk with the wrongdoer and determine what action should be taken. (w88 11/15 pp. 18-20)

They may instruct him not to share in the public ministry or comment at meetings, and they may restrict him from being in the Theocratic Ministry School until he has made more spiritual progress.

If the wrongdoing is widely known but the person is repentant, the Congregation Service Committee may arrange for an announcement to the congregation as follows: "A matter involving [name of person] has been handled, and he [she] continues to serve as an unbaptized publisher with the congregation." (w88 11/15 p. 18)

When the unbaptized publisher who is a wrongdoer is a minor, his or her Christian parents should be consulted to determine what they are doing to correct the wrongdoer. It may also be necessary to meet with the youth together with his parents.

In the case of unbaptized publishers who unrepentantly continue in wrongdoing despite all efforts to help them, an announcement can be made saying: "[Name of person] is no longer a publisher of the good news." (w88 11/15 p. 19)

Your goal in dealing with unbaptized publishers, whether youths or adults, is to help them. (1 Thess. 5:14)

Baptized persons who have not associated for some time.

If you learn of serious wrongdoing on the part of such a person, the matter should be investigated if it poses a threat to the congregation's cleanness and welfare or causes a public scandal.

Consider the following:

Does he still profess to be a Witness?

Is he generally recognized as such in the congregation and/or the community?

Does the person have a measure of contact or association with the congregation so that a leavening, or corrupting, influence exists?

How did the matter become known to the elders?

Is the person willing to meet with a committee, thus admitting accountability to the Christian congregation?

Depending upon length of inactivity and other factors suggested above, elders may determine to hold the matter in abeyance.

In such a case, a record of the person's questionable conduct should be made for the congregation file so that everything noted might be clarified when the person shows interest in becoming active again.

If the sinful conduct is known only to believing family members and no congregation action is taken because of the factors outlined above, believing relatives will likely determine to curtail family association severely, viewing the relative as bad association. (1 Cor. 15:33)

If the individual still professes to be a Witness and is willing to meet with the judicial committee, the matter should be handled in the normal way. However, when factors such as possible legal action exist, it is best to consult the Society before proceeding. (w87 9/1 p. 14)

If individuals persist in “*walking disorderly*” in serious violation of well-established Bible principles, but not yet to a degree warranting judicial action, they may be “*marked*” by members of the congregation. (2 Thess. 3: 6, 14, 15; w85 4/15 pp. 30-1; om pp. 152-3)

However, this would occur only after *repeated efforts* to provide authoritative Scriptural counsel and admonition have been ignored and in many cases after a warning talk has been given to the congregation. (w85 4/15 pp. 30-1; w81 9/1 pp. 19-21)

If a person who has been marked continues his wrongful course in brazen defiance of Christian standards, *adamantly rejecting loving Scriptural counsel*, judicial action may be taken if the situation becomes scandalous loose conduct.

Propriety of Disfellowshipping

When making decisions or answering questions about judicial reproof, disfellowshipping, disassociation, or

reinstatement, elders should be certain that their decisions and answers are based solidly on the Bible and are in harmony with the most recent statements by the Society. (Compare 1 Corinthians 4:6.)

Before initiating a judicial hearing, elders assigned to serve on the judicial committee should *review* guidelines set out in *Units 5 (a), 5 (b), and 5 (c)* as well as examine pertinent scriptures and references in the Society's publications.

They should also be sure to proceed in harmony with *current information* published in *The Watchtower* and in letters from the Society.

Purposes served by disfellowshipping:

Upholds Jehovah's name and standard of righteousness. (Acts 15:14; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; compare Isaiah 52:5.)

Protects the purity of the congregation. (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 7:11)

May correct the unrepentant wrongdoer, bringing him to his senses. (2 Cor. 2:6-8)

Implications of Disassociation

Whereas disfellowshipping is an action taken by a judicial committee against unrepentant wrongdoers, disassociation is an action taken by an individual who has decided that he no longer desires to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. (1 John 2:19)

God's Word speaks of those who renounce the way of the truth; they may do this either by written notice or by action. (*w81* 9/15 p. 23)

If an individual takes a course contrary to the neutral position of the Christian congregation, the congregation is compelled to view him as one who has chosen to separate from us. (Isa. 2:4; John 15:17-19)

A brief announcement should be made to notify the congregation that this individual, by his chosen course, no longer desires to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. (The Society should be notified using the S-77 and S-79 forms.)

If a baptized person insists that he does not want to be part of the congregation and requests that his name be removed from all our records, we should comply with his request.

Since he takes such an adamant position, encourage him to put his request in writing.

If he refuses to do this but states resolutely before witnesses his decision to disassociate himself and not be known as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, the witnesses to his statement would be asked to put this in writing and sign it.

In all cases of disassociation, a committee would consider the evidence regarding the matter.

If the person has definitely terminated his status as a member of the congregation, the elders will make a brief announcement of his disassociation. (*w86 10/15 p. 31*)

The Society should be notified using the S-77 and S-79 forms.

He would be viewed as one who has disassociated himself.

It will not be necessary for a committee to continue the investigation into alleged wrongdoing if the accused person makes known his decision to disassociate himself. (*w84 7/1 p. 31*)

However, the committee would prepare a summary of the alleged offense(s) and the evidence of such.

This would be kept along with information regarding the disassociation.

If the person later requests reinstatement, these matters would need to be considered with him at that time.

Those who disassociate themselves should be viewed and treated the same as disfellowshipped persons. (*w85 7/15 pp. 30-1*)

If one disassociates himself and later wants to return to the congregation, he must request a hearing for reinstatement, the same as one who has been disfellowshipped.

Proper View of Disfellowshipped and Disassociated Persons

If an individual is trying to influence others to take an unscriptural course or is trying to deceive others, all should avoid him; he is described at 2 John 9-11.

Disfellowshipped and disassociated ones are shunned by those who wish to have a good relationship with Jehovah.

Basic Scriptural counsel on the proper view of those who have been expelled from the congregation is set out in the apostle Paul's words at 1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

John counsels against speaking to or associating with a disfellowshipped or disassociated person so as not to be "a sharer in his wicked works." (2 John 11)

Scriptural and historical guidelines on how to view disfellowshipped and disassociated persons are found in *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1981, pages 20-31.

We need to be especially cautious about contact with disfellowshipped persons who have apostatized and those who continue in their immoral conduct. (Titus 3: 10, 11; 1 John 2:19)

These can contaminate the congregation like gangrene. (2 Tim. 2:16-18)

The principle set forth in Jesus' words at Matthew 10: 34-38 has a bearing on situations involving disfellowshipped or disassociated relatives.

Special and difficult problems may arise in relation to social gatherings.

Loyal worshipers of Jehovah will want to adhere to the inspired counsel at 1 Corinthians 5:11.

Normally, a close relative would not be disfellowshipped for associating with a disfellowshipped person unless there is spiritual association or an effort made to justify or excuse the wrongful course.

How funeral arrangements for a disfellowshipped person may be handled:

If the disfellowshipped person had been giving evidence of repentance, some brother's conscience might allow him to give a Bible talk at the funeral home or grave site. However, the Kingdom Hall should not be used. (*w*81 9/15 p. 31; *w*77 6/1 pp. 347-8)

If the deceased still advocated false teachings or ungodly conduct, it would not be appropriate to give a funeral talk for him. (2 John 9-11)

Keep in mind that all the related hardships and tests generated in this regard are an outgrowth of the wrong conduct of the disfellowshipped person.

Cooperation Between Congregations

When a case being considered requires the cooperation of two or more congregations, do not hesitate to provide the assistance needed.

If a person has moved from one congregation to another, do not make the matter of jurisdiction an issue.

Do you have the facts? Can you handle the case most effectively?

Then it may be appropriate for you to follow through without delay.

If the wrongdoing involves persons who attend different congregations, seek assistance from elders in the other congregation(s) and benefit from their observations.

The judicial committees can interview individuals separately and/or jointly to ascertain the facts and clarify discrepancies. (Prov. 18:13, 17)

If a joint meeting is held, thereafter the judicial committee of each congregation will withdraw and handle the case(s) of the person(s) from its own congregation.

Good communication and cooperation will minimize inconsistencies in the judgments rendered.

Do not let a matter remain unhandled.

Confidentiality

Do not discuss private or judicial matters with members of your family, including your wife, or with others who are not involved. (*w*71 4/1 pp. 222-4)

Think before you speak.

Be extremely careful that you do not inadvertently disclose private information when speaking on the telephone while others are listening in or when people are nearby where they could possibly hear the conversation.

At times, complicated judicial cases may necessitate consultation with an experienced mature elder in another congregation or with the circuit overseer.

Generally, the pertinent details should be discussed, but names should not be used.

However, when the circuit overseer is the elder consulted or when circumstances require that you contact the Society, use of names may be necessary. (*w*87 9/1 pp. 12-15; *km* 9/77 p. 6)

Be careful to *maintain confidentiality*. (Prov. 11:13; 15:22)

Be “Imitators of God”

Jehovah is a God of justice; he is merciful, kind, loving, and patient. (Ex. 34:6, 7; Ps. 37:28)

As you deal with your brothers, imitate Jehovah in displaying these qualities, and you will bring honor to him and be a blessing to your brothers. (Eph. 5:1)

UNIT 5 (b)

Sharing on a Judicial Committee

“When having a hearing between your brothers, you must judge with righteousness.” (Deut. 1:16) It is a serious responsibility to judge matters that affect people’s lives and relationships with others. Elders must have a reasonably complete picture when judging a matter so that their decisions will not be based on partial knowledge or on personal feelings. They also need heavenly wisdom in order to make proper application of God’s Word and to determine how far their showing mercy should extend. (Prov. 28:13; Jas. 2:13) They must treat every person with impartiality at all times and desire that the spiritually ill become well again, since a failure in this regard is unjust and violates the law of love.—1 Tim. 5:21; Jas. 2:1-9; 5:14, 15; *w77* 3/1 pp. 146-52.

Elders Are Teachers and Judges

As “Judge of all the earth,” Jehovah provides fatherly correction and discipline whenever needed. (Gen. 18:25; Heb. 12:5, 6)

He has raised up elders to serve as counselors and judges. (Isa. 1:26)

By judging in righteousness, you may turn others back from a sinful course. (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23, 24)

God’s Word is the basis for needed correction. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

The responsibility of elders involves more than handling judicial matters.

You must also teach, making clear what God requires.

Encourage the rendering of whole-souled service to God and faithful obedience to his righteous principles.

Applying Jesus' Counsel on Handling Certain Wrongs

Some accusations involve minor misunderstandings that should be handled on a personal basis. (Matt. 5:23, 24; 6:12, 14; Eph. 4:25-27)

At Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus gave counsel on handling serious wrongs that might be settled on a personal basis. (*w81* 9/15 pp. 17-20; *om* pp. 142-5)

Jesus' counsel concerns serious sins committed against one personally, such as fraud or slander—sins serious enough to lead to a person's being expelled from the congregation.

The person who believes he has been wronged takes the first step toward resolving the matter; elders may encourage him to do this. (Matt. 18:15)

The second step involves taking one or two persons with him to speak with the individual. (Matt. 18:16)

These should preferably be witnesses of the alleged wrongdoing or respected brothers, usually elders, who can examine the evidence and offer counsel for resolving the matter.

They also become witnesses to the evidence presented in the discussion.

The person who believes he has been wronged takes the third step, bringing the matter to the congregation, as a last resort. (Matt. 18:17)

If the congregation elders are unable to bring a wrongdoer to his senses, he is to be treated "as a man of the nations and as a tax collector."

The unrepentant wrongdoer would be expelled (disfellowshipped) from the congregation.

The Judicial Committee

Other cases of serious wrongdoing require special attention by the elders in order to determine what is needed

to help the repentant wrongdoer and to preserve the spiritual health of all in the congregation.

These include such sins as adultery, fornication, apostasy, and drunkenness. (See Unit 5 (a), pages 92-6.)

Before forming a committee, elders determine if the accusation has substance.

It must Scripturally be an offense serious enough to result in disfellowshipping.

There must be either two witnesses or a confession of wrongdoing.

If there is not enough evidence to form a committee but serious questions have been raised, two elders may be assigned to investigate the matter.

If a judicial committee is needed, elders who are present at the Kingdom Hall should determine which elders will serve on the committee and which one will be chairman.

The elders will take into consideration which elders are best qualified to handle the particular type of case that has arisen. (*km* 9/77 pp. 5-6)

It is usually best for newer elders to serve first with more experienced ones.

In a complex case, a judicial committee need not be limited to three members; it may warrant having four or even five experienced elders serve.

More than one judicial committee may be operating at the same time in a congregation, depending on cases that arise.

Elders called upon to care for this responsibility must exercise heavenly wisdom, have good judgment, and be impartial. (Deut. 1:13, 16-18)

A sound knowledge of Jehovah's righteous laws and principles is necessary. (Ps. 19:7-11)

They must weigh matters carefully, realizing that certain factors make situations differ from one another.

Instead of looking for rigid rules for guidance, elders should think in terms of principles; judge each case on its own merits.

Before handling a judicial case, elders should carefully review Units 5 (a), 5 (b), and 5 (c).

They may also need to do research in the Society's publications and recent correspondence from the Society to find information that may apply or be helpful.

Elders can be confident that with accurate knowledge, with experience and discernment, and with the help of God's spirit, they can judge in righteousness, wisdom, and mercy.

Handling Judicial Cases

Do not send an individual any kind of correspondence that directly accuses him of specific wrongdoing.

It is best for two elders to speak with the individual and invite him to meet with the judicial committee.

Suitable arrangements should be made as to the time and place of the hearing.

State what the person's course of action is supposed to have been.

If it is necessary to send a written invitation, you should simply state what the individual's course is *alleged* to have been, the time and place of the hearing, and how the person can contact the chairman if the arrangements are inconvenient for him.

If the accused wishes to bring witnesses who can speak in his defense regarding the matter, he may do so.

However, observers are not permitted.

No tape-recording devices are allowed.

If the accused repeatedly fails to come to the hearing, the committee will proceed with the hearing but will not

make a decision until evidence and any testimony by witnesses are considered.

The committee should not take action against a person unless the evidence clearly proves this necessary.

Failure to appear before the committee is not in itself proof of guilt.

What kind of evidence is acceptable?

There must be two or three eyewitnesses, not just persons repeating what they have heard; no action can be taken if there is only one witness. (Deut. 19:15; John 8:17)

Confession (admission of wrongdoing), either written or oral, may be accepted as conclusive proof without other corroborating evidence. (Josh. 7:19)

Strong circumstantial evidence, such as pregnancy or evidence (testified to by at least two witnesses) 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*, is acceptable.

The testimony of youths may be considered; it is up to the elders to determine if the testimony has the ring of truth.

The testimony of unbelievers may also be considered, but it must be carefully weighed.

If there are two or three witnesses to the same kind of wrongdoing but each one is witness to a separate incident, their testimony can be considered.

Such evidence may be used to establish guilt, but it is preferable to have two witnesses to the same occurrence of wrongdoing.

Judging With Righteousness, Wisdom, and Mercy

Elders must exercise wisdom in their questioning and godly qualities in their judging.

In giving counsel or rendering decisions, avoid expressing

opinions; be sure to judge in righteousness. (Deut. 1: 16, 17)

You must ask pertinent, discreet questions to isolate main issues and determine how or why a problem developed.

Probing questions should not go into needless details, especially in regard to sexual misconduct, unless this is *absolutely* necessary, such as in determining whether *por-nei'a* had been committed.

Elders need to treat the accused kindly and respectfully, never harshly. (*w89* 9/15 p. 19)

Seek divine wisdom to help you relate Bible laws to the issues raised or the charges being considered. (Jas. 1:5; 3: 17, 18)

You must exercise mercy in matters of judgment, not only by showing compassion in the judgment rendered but also by expressing kind consideration and pity in your efforts both to bring wrongdoers to repentance and to heal and restore those who are repentant. (Rom. 2:4; Jas. 5:14-16; Jude 22, 23)

In cases where it is established that a serious sin was actually committed, the judicial committee should consider such factors as these:

Is there evidence of the person's craving wrongful things or courting trouble? Or did the person momentarily succumb to weakness? (Jas. 4:1)

Was he aware of the gravity of his sin? (Gal. 6:1)

Had he been admonished that his course was leading toward danger? (1 Thess. 5:14)

What were the circumstances leading up to the wrongdoing?

Are there extenuating factors, such as emotional or mental disorders or having been a victim of some type of abuse in the past, that should be considered?

Was it a single offense, or was it committed more than once?

Was his confession voluntary, or did he have to be accused by others before confessing?

Was his reluctance to speak more a result of deep shame than of lack of repentance?

Above all, does he show true repentance and manifest a heartfelt desire to avoid repetition of the wrong?

Even though the wrongdoer is guilty of a serious offense, elders on the judicial committee realize that their aim is to recover the one who has fallen into a wrong course, whenever this is possible. (Jude 23)

If he listens to them, showing true repentance, it may be that he can be retained as a brother and thus be spared being disfellowshipped. (Prov. 19:20; compare Matthew 18:15-17.)

Neither the gravity of the wrong nor bad publicity finally determines whether the person should be disfellowshipped; rather, the determining factor is the individual's sincere repentance or the lack of it.

Some manifest repentance right after their sin by taking steps immediately to confess; others manifest repentance later, even during the meeting with the judicial committee. (w83 1/1 pp. 30-1)

It is in the person's favor if he voluntarily confesses, but the determining factor is: Is he repentant?

There is good reason for you to weigh carefully claims of repentance when the individual has shown himself to be guilty of hypocrisy, lying, or making deliberate efforts to deceive.

Also be cautious when it is apparent that the wrong act was preceded by deliberate scheming, perhaps in a cold, calculating way.

This is quite different from when an individual, under the unexpected pressure of certain tempting circumstances, gives in because of human weakness.

Judgment Related to Repentance

Elders must be able to discern genuine repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. (*w81 9/1 pp. 24-6; it-2 pp. 770-4*)

Genuine repentance is vital for wrongdoers because it is the first step leading back to God. (Rom. 2:4)

It is particularly important to be sure genuine repentance exists in cases of repeated sin, a practice of sin.

If gross sin extended over a long period of time, particular care should be exercised in determining the genuineness of the repentance. (*w81 9/1 p. 26*)

Is the person cooperative? When questioned, are his answers forthright?

Was fear and weakness the reason he did not come forward and confess, or is he wicked, trying to fool the congregation?

Has he been counseled before for this sin?

Repentance is generally manifested by works that befit repentance either before or during the committee hearing. (Compare Acts 26:20.)

How true repentance can be recognized:

Has the individual contritely prayed to Jehovah and sought His forgiveness and mercy?

Caution: Some wrongdoers, though repentant, find it difficult to pray. (Jas. 5:14)

Has he admitted his wrongdoing, either voluntarily to some of the elders before the hearing or when confronted by his accusers?

Caution: Some people are so deeply ashamed that they are reluctant to speak. Or they have difficulty expressing themselves.

Has he made restitution, expressed willingness to do so, or apologized to offended persons, those damaged by his sinful course?

What seems to motivate the sadness, remorse, and regret he shows? Is it worldly sadness (sorrow over being caught) or heartfelt godly sadness? (2 Cor. 7: 8-11)

Does he have deep regret over a damaged relationship with Jehovah, remorse over the reproach he has brought upon Jehovah's name and people, and sincere longing to come back into God's favor?

Does his attitude include a heart-motivated rejection of the bad course as something repugnant, hated? (Rom. 12:9)

On occasion it may take *more than one meeting* for reproof to reach the wrongdoer's heart and move him to repentance.

However, the judicial committee is not obliged to meet repeatedly with the wrongdoer or put words in his mouth, trying to force him to repent, if it is obvious that he lacks godly sorrow.

In all cases, the elders on the judicial committee must weigh such factors as the following:

The seriousness of the wrong committed.

The time that has passed since it occurred.

The circumstances that led up to it.

The measure of willfulness shown.

Whether there was *deliberate* failure to heed earlier warning counsel.

If all reasonable efforts have been made to readjust the one who has committed serious sins and yet he remains unrepentant, he must be disfellowshipped. (1 Cor. 5:1, 9-13)

You must show respect for Jehovah's standard of righteousness and holiness.

You must also protect the congregation from willful sinners.

The same principles will govern the judgment on the part of a judicial committee in cases of reinstatement.

The Responsibility of Judgment Is a Weighty One

Judging matters that affect people's lives and relationships is a serious responsibility; it calls for balance, discernment, and understanding. Rely on Jehovah's guiding spirit.

Elders on a judicial committee must weigh carefully both the interests of the individual and those of the congregation as a whole. (Jude 3, 4, 22, 23)

You must feel keenly your obligation before God to prevent wrongdoing from infiltrating the congregation.

At the same time, your manner of dealing with your brothers must always reflect Jehovah's wise and merciful ways.

UNIT 5 (c)

Handling Cases of Wrongdoing With Wisdom and Mercy

When man rebelled in Eden, Jehovah took prompt action. (Gen. 3:8-19, 23, 24) Today, elders must handle cases of wrongdoing and thus safeguard the spiritual environment of the congregation. Hence, they should be well-informed with regard to the application of Bible laws and principles.

When you as elders are assigned to care for a judicial problem, it is beneficial to take the necessary time to do research in the Bible, the Society's publications, and any special letters from the Society that may contain information applicable to the particular case. Prayerful consideration of such information would be appropriate before the committee initiates the hearing itself.

Before Forming a Judicial Committee

A person who becomes a witness to a serious sin should encourage the wrongdoer to report the matter to the elders.

He may encourage the wrongdoer to seek help from the elders and confess; and if the wrongdoer does not do so, the witness will then inform the elders. (*w85* 11/15 pp. 19-21)

If there is no response from the accused, two elders should attempt to discuss the matter with him. If he denies wrongdoing, so that it is only one brother's word against another's, leave the matter in Jehovah's hands. (1 Tim. 5:19, 24, 25)

However, having the witness confront the accused alone may not be advisable in all cases.

For example:

When the witness is party to wrongdoing, such as in cases of fornication or adultery.

When the witness is a victim of the wrongdoer as in cases of incest or rape.

When the witness is extremely timid.

In such cases, or when other extenuating circumstances exist, two elders may discuss the matter with the accused, or an elder may accompany the witness to discuss the matter with the accused.

Of course, if it is determined that a judicial committee should be formed, the witness may need to testify at the hearing if the accused denies wrongdoing.

If there is another witness to the same type of sin on the part of the accused, this would be basis for forming a judicial committee. (See Unit 5 (b), page 111.)

Judicial Committee Hearing Procedure

After opening with prayer, the chairman states the reason for the meeting.

He may offer a Scriptural point at the outset, such as from Proverbs 28:13 or James 5:14, 15.

Elders, by expressing the desire to be helpful, can do much to put the accused at ease. (w89 9/15 pp. 19-20)

The chairman invites the accused to make a personal statement.

Present the witnesses one at a time unless the wrongdoer confesses.

If the accused does not admit guilt, he should be informed as to the source of the charge(s) made against him.

Accusers should be willing to assume their responsibility, as was required in Israel. (Deut. 17:6, 7; 19:16-21)

The accused may also present witnesses whose testimony would have a bearing on the case.

The witnesses should not be present for the entire hearing, since they do not need to hear details and testimony that do not affect them.

However, witnesses to the wrongdoing should be present if it becomes necessary to continue the reproof of the accused "before all onlookers." (1 Tim. 5:20)

The committee probes with pertinent questions in an effort to establish facts and ascertain the attitude of the accused.

Is there sufficient evidence to establish by two witnesses or otherwise that the person is clearly guilty of serious wrongdoing? (Unit 5 (b) p. 111) Isolate specific offenses and available evidence.

While it is not appropriate to make extraordinary efforts or to prolong the case unnecessarily, skillful use of God's Word may reach the person's heart and bring him to repentance.

Elders should be quick to listen but slow to indicate a preference or a leaning one way or the other.

Wait until you have heard all the facts before reaching conclusions and making decisions. (Prov. 18:13)

If guilt is established, use God's Word to reprove the wrongdoer, showing the wrongness of the sin and of the steps that may have led to it.

You may need to do so in front of the witnesses of the sin ("onlookers") who have testified.

After Scriptural discussion and after all evidence has been presented, dismiss the accused and any witnesses, and carefully review evidence and the attitude of the accused.

If the accusation, or charge, has been proved true, is the wrongdoer repentant? If repentance is manifest, how was it demonstrated? (Unit 5 (b) pp. 112-15)

Depending on whether guilt is established and repentance shown, determine what action, if any, needs to be taken.

In complex cases, defer making a decision if you are not sure of the Bible's direction and the Society's counsel.

However, do not unduly prolong making a decision, as this can have a detrimental effect on the accused and the congregation.

Seek Jehovah's wisdom through prayer.

If the wrongdoer is guilty of gross sin but gives evidence of godly repentance, even as recently as at the hearing, the judicial reproof given by the committee may suffice; disfellowshipping may not be necessary. (2 Tim. 4:1, 2; Titus 1:9; *w83* 1/1 pp. 30-1)

Some wrongdoers have gone so far into a practice of sin or have been so persistently deceptive that it may be difficult to accept a claim of repentance. (1 Cor. 5: 3-5, 13)

If the person is guilty of a serious sin such as those listed in Unit 5 (a), pages 92-6, and is unrepentant, having a truly bad heart, and/or is determined to pursue a God-dishonoring course, he must be disfellowshipped, expelled.

When the decision is made, inform the individual of it orally.

If disfellowshipping is necessary, proceed as outlined under the next heading.

If disfellowshipping is not necessary, yet the accused is guilty of gross sin, see "Matters Regarding Judicial Reproof," pages 123-4.

If the Decision Is to Disfellowship

Tell the guilty person the Scriptural reason(s) for the action.

Inform the wrongdoer that he may appeal in writing within seven days if he feels a serious error in judgment has occurred. (*om* p. 147; *km* 1/80 p. 4)

Outline steps necessary for future reinstatement.

Be positive, assuring him that forgiveness is possible if he truly repents; the person may be in a distressed state of mind.

If an appeal is lodged within the allotted time, no announcement is made pending the outcome of the appeal.

In the meantime the accused person will be restricted

from commenting and praying at meetings or enjoying special privileges of service. (*om* pp. 147-8)

If the accused lodges an appeal but then deliberately fails to appear for the appeal hearing, the disfellowshipping action should be announced after reasonable efforts to contact the individual have been made either in person or by telephone.

If an appeal is not made within seven days, announce the disfellowshipping.

Allow the seven-day appeal period to elapse even if the person states he does not wish to appeal.

The presiding overseer should check the announcement to make sure that it conforms to the guidelines outlined by the Society.

An elder, perhaps the chairman of the judicial committee, should read the announcement.

Disfellowshipping *takes effect when the announcement is made* to the congregation.

Using the forms provided by the Society, the branch office should be notified of the person's name, the Scriptural reason for the disfellowshipping, and the date of the action. (S-77 and S-79 forms)

A brief review of the evidence that was presented should also be given.

A similar report is made when a person disassociates himself from the organization. (S-77 and S-79 forms)

A written summary of the case should be prepared by the committee and put in a sealed envelope to be placed in the congregation file.

If a disfellowshipped individual moves to a different area, no announcement of his disfellowshipped status should be made from the platform of the new congregation.

Publishers can be advised individually if they are inadvertently having association with such a one.

Matters Regarding Judicial Reproof

Reproof involves establishing wrongdoing and convincing the wrongdoer of the error.

Thus, administering judicial reproof includes more than just making a decision or announcing it. (*w77 11/15 pp. 691-2*)

The aim is to help the person stop doing what is bad and establish himself as a practitioner of what is good.

Help him to understand how there may have been related sins, which were less serious, that led to his serious deflection from Jehovah's law.

Some wrongdoers may need to be judicially reproofed with severity to bring them to repentance. (Titus 1:13)

At times it is appropriate to administer judicial reproof "before all onlookers." (1 Tim. 5:20)

Be sure to adhere to Scriptural and organizational guidelines when this is done. (*w81 9/1 pp. 24, 26*)

The "onlookers" may be those present as witnesses at the committee hearing or those who know of the sin.

If there are *good reasons* for it, an announcement of judicial reproof may be made to the congregation. (*w88 11/15 p. 18; w81 9/1 pp. 26-7*)

The degree or seriousness of the sin *is not* the determining factor for an announcement regarding judicial reproof.

In cases where sin is widely known or will no doubt become known, an announcement may be needed to safeguard the reputation of the congregation.

The committee may have *specific reasons* why the congregation needs to be somewhat on guard concerning the repentant wrongdoer. Perhaps he had been counseled several times concerning steps leading to the same wrongdoing.

In some cases the elders may feel it is necessary to warn the congregation about the type of conduct practiced.

If so and if no announcement is made, a talk may be

given at any time outlining clearly what the Scriptures have to say on the subject.

If an announcement regarding judicial reproof is made, a few weeks after the announcement such a talk may be given.

Nothing should be said that would connect anyone with the type of sin being discussed. Rather, cover Scriptural principles outlining the seriousness of such sinful conduct and how to avoid it.

In all cases of judicial reproof, restrictions will be imposed.

If the wrongdoer is an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer, he should be removed. (*w*77 11/15 pp. 697-8)

It is important that the judicial committee monitor the spiritual progress of a person who has been judicially restricted; appropriate counsel and spiritual encouragement should be given periodically. (*w*81 9/1 p. 27; *km* 3/75 p. 4)

Restrictions should be removed in due course as warranted by the individual's observed spiritual recovery.

If a brother who has recently been judicially reproofed moves to another congregation, it is necessary to inform the elders of that congregation about any restrictions that may be in effect.

This will enable the elders in his new congregation to continue supervising the restoration of his privileges and help him toward full spiritual recovery.

No announcement of such previous judicial reproof is made in the new congregation. (*km* 3/75 p. 4)

Appealing Judicial Decisions

If the accused believes that an error in judgment was committed, he should make known in writing his reason for requesting an appeal, doing so within seven days from the time he was notified of the decision of the committee.

His written statement should be addressed to the judicial committee that decided the matter.

The judicial committee chairman will promptly contact the circuit overseer, who will then designate elders to serve on the appeal committee.

If possible, elders selected by the circuit overseer for hearing the appeal should not be from the same congregation as the original committee.

If the basis for the appeal is not clear in the written statement, try to determine which of the following is claimed:

He contends that a disfellowshipping offense was not committed.

He denies committing the alleged wrong.

He admits to wrongdoing but believes he was repentant.

The appeal should be heard even if the basis for it may not appear sound. (*km* 1/80 p. 4)

If the person should appeal after seven days, immediately contact the Society for direction.

The hearing is conducted in a manner similar to the first judicial committee hearing.

It may be necessary to rehear all the evidence relevant to the case, including that which was presented originally and any new evidence now available.

The judicial committee that heard the original case should be present at the appeal hearing(s).

Prior to the appeal hearing, the original committee should furnish the appeal committee with the completed S-77 and S-79 forms along with whatever written records it has from the first hearing(s).

If either the original committee or the accused believes that earlier testimony or evidence is being changed, this can be so stated following the presentation of the alleged altered evidence.

Following the presentation of the evidence, the appeal committee should deliberate in private.

The appeal committee may need to question either the original committee or the accused separately.

The appeal committee is to determine whether there was an error in judgment or the decision was basically sound according to information available; it should also determine the attitude of the accused at the original committee hearing(s).

The appeal committee is to ascertain whether there was a Scriptural basis for the original action taken and whether the individual was repentant *at the time of the hearing by the original judicial committee*.

There may be mitigating circumstances the committee overlooked, such as a history of some type of abuse when a child, emotional or mental disorders, or other.

While these do not justify wrongdoing, understanding the underlying reason or causes of emotional or mental problems can help the committee to reach a balanced and compassionate judgment. (*w90* 2/15 pp. 21-3; *w83* 10/1 pp. 27-31)

The wrongdoer may admit guilt on a disfellowshipping charge but claim that at the time of the original judicial committee hearing, he was repentant. (*w83* 1/1 pp. 30-1)

The appeal committee will examine evidence to see if he had genuinely repented. (Unit 5 (b) pp. 112-15; *w81* 9/1 pp. 25-6)

The appeal committee may find that while the original basis for disfellowshipping was invalid, other valid grounds for disfellowshipping exist.

If this happens, the individual should be given sufficient time, even several days if needed, to present any evidence or witnesses that he feels will disprove the new allegations.

If the new allegations are nonetheless established and if the person does not demonstrate genuine repentance, the appeal committee may decide to disfellowship on these new grounds.

The appeal committee should then inform the accused of its decision to uphold the disfellowshipping and

should also inform him of the steps he needs to take to gain reinstatement.

New S-77 and S-79 forms should be made out giving the proper information, and these along with the original forms and correspondence related to the case should be sent to the branch office.

When the disfellowshipping is upheld by the appeal committee, there is no further right to appeal. However, if an individual persists in believing a serious error in judgment has occurred, the appeal committee should inform him that he may submit his allegations in writing to the appeal committee within seven days for transmittal to the branch office.

The appeal committee will include this statement along with the information being sent to the branch office.

No announcement of disfellowshipping should be made until observations are received from the branch office.

If no written claim of a serious error in judgment has been provided to the appeal committee within seven days (as outlined above), the appeal committee should send in the S-77 and S-79 forms and tell the original committee to announce the disfellowshipping.

If the appeal committee disagrees with the decision to disfellowship, the decision should be discussed with the original judicial committee privately.

If both committees agree that the person should not be disfellowshipped, the individual should be so advised.

The appeal committee will send the branch office a brief explanation of the mutual conclusion not to disfellowship reached by both committees, which should clearly state that the original judicial committee agrees with the decision.

The original committee will receive a copy of the letter, which will be kept in a sealed envelope in the congregation's confidential file.

Where there is evidence of *conspiracy* between individuals to put away their mates and marry each other, considerable time should elapse before a hearing for reinstatement may be held. (*w79* 11/15 pp. 31-2)

If it is determined that the wrongdoer is sincerely repentant, has discontinued his former wrong conduct, and is doing works that befit repentance, he can be reinstated. (Compare Acts 26:20.)

The decision to reinstate is made by a judicial committee of the congregation that took the disfellowshipping action. The secretary should sign and return the S-79b card to the Society immediately. (*om* pp. 149-50)

If the disfellowshipped person has moved, his request for reinstatement may be heard by a local judicial committee where he is now attending meetings. Thereafter, that committee will give the body of elders of the congregation that disfellowshipped the individual its recommendation.

If the two congregations are reasonably close to each other, the judicial committee of the congregation that took the disfellowshipping action should meet with the disfellowshipped individual after receiving the recommendation of the committee of the congregation where he made his plea for reinstatement.

Reinstatement is announced in the congregation where the person was disfellowshipped as well as in the congregation where he now attends.

When an individual is reinstated, he will still need much spiritual assistance.

The elders should see that definite arrangements are made to help the person regain spiritual health and strength. (Col. 2:7; Titus 2:1, 2)

They may arrange for a Bible study to be conducted, which would be reported as field service.

Restrictions should be imposed to help the person see the need of continuing to make 'straight paths for his feet' and also out of consideration for the congregation's conscience. (Heb. 12:13)

The privilege of sharing in the field service is restored when the individual is reinstated.

Other privileges, such as commenting at meetings, handling parts on the program, and offering prayer at meetings, can be restored progressively when it is determined that the individual has progressed spiritually to the point that he is qualified and when it is judged by the elders that the extending of such privileges will not be offensive to the congregation.

It will be up to the elders of the congregation where he now is located to decide when certain privileges may be restored.

Circumstances of each case govern the length of time that should elapse before *recommending a reinstated brother* for additional privileges and responsibility.

Carefully consider possible effects if the individual were to be appointed. Would it be a *cause for stumbling* among the brothers?

The privilege of serving as ministerial servant or elder can be recommended only after he has had ample time to *prove* himself to be irreprehensible and is again "free from accusation" and has "freeness of speech." (1 Tim. 3:2, 9, 10, 13)

He must live down the reproach and build up a convincing record of righteousness, which may take a number of years.

If wrongdoing occurred in another congregation, the feelings of members of that congregation should be considered.

In cases of scandal, he might not be able to live down his wrongdoing sufficiently to qualify for an appointment to serve as a ministerial servant or an elder for a very long time.

An individual continuing employment directly involved with gambling or employment making him a *clear accomplice* or *promoter* of a wrong practice would be subject to disfellowshipping after being allowed time, usually 90 days, to make the needed adjustment. (*km* 9/76 pp. 3-6)

**God's Word counsels all Christians to be *law-abiding*.
(Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1)**

Christians are to pay to Caesar what is Caesar's and should obey the laws of the land in all matters where there is no conflict with God's law. (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1; *w*90 11/1 pp. 10-15, 18-28)

By doing this, they have no need to fear being punished by the authorities as lawbreakers, and each one can maintain a good conscience. (Rom. 13:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:16)

When human laws conflict with God's law, true Christians follow the example of the apostles of Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29-32)

In all business matters, Christians should endeavor to maintain a fine reputation.

They should not be a part of any business that is forbidden by Caesar's law or engage in business practices that are illegal.

It is wise to avoid making purchases from or employing the services of individuals or businesses known to be illegal in their operation.

A person's employment should also be honorable so that it will not become a cause for reproach or stumbling.

Following Scriptural counsel protects a Christian from consequences of lawbreaking and protects his conscience. (Rom. 13:3, 5)

If the elders learn of illegal activity or of some serious crime on the part of a member of the congregation, they may not be obliged by law to report the offender or the offense to secular authorities.

Though it is not the responsibility of the Christian congregation to enforce Caesar's laws, yet the very nature of some crimes demands that they be reported to secular authorities.

It may be necessary to encourage the wrongdoer to turn himself in to secular authorities. Before any steps are taken in this regard, contact the branch office. Of course, review the latest Society directives on such matters before proceeding.

Although not enforcers of Caesar's laws, in cases that also involve the breaking of God's law, elders must give consideration to what has taken place.

Depending on the wrongdoing committed, a judicial committee hearing may be needed.

As suggested by the apostle Paul's comments regarding Onesimus, a person who was guilty of illegal activities before coming to a knowledge of the truth is not required to settle these things with the authorities prior to baptism. (Philem. 10-18; *w*78 9/15 pp. 30-1)

A former thief would not be required to make restitution to all from whom he stole before baptism, although in some cases his conscience may move him to do so. (Luke 19:8)

The blood of Jesus Christ covers the sins of such new ones. They may get baptized. However, it is best to be judicious as to extending additional privileges. (Isa. 1:18; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6; 1 John 1:7)

If a person approaching baptism is an *illegal alien*, he should be urged to do what he can to rectify his status with regard to the law of the land. (*w*77 3/15 pp. 191-2)

The Christian congregation today follows a course harmonious with the Biblical pattern of the apostle's dealing with the case of Onesimus. (Philem. 8-22)

Overseers are not to police the lives of the brothers, nor are they obligated to become acquainted with all the details of civil and criminal law so as to enforce these. Just as they do not check to see if someone's home meets every detail of the building

code, they do not investigate in order to determine whether a person has satisfied every detail as to his legal situation in the country before allowing him to get baptized or to continue in the congregation.

Baptism would not be denied such a person, but he would not be viewed as exemplary and would not be used in any responsible position in the congregation. The same would apply to a person who uses fraudulent or illegal identification.

A brother who has notified the authorities of his illegal status and filed papers to resolve his situation would not be restricted as to representing the congregation in prayer, sharing in teaching, or being appointed as a pioneer, a ministerial servant, or an elder if otherwise qualified.

Such privileges may be extended even though the authorities do not act promptly on his request for permission to remain in the country. He is no longer a fugitive.

Certain disputes between brothers should not be taken to *secular courts* but should be resolved in harmony with Jesus' counsel at Matthew 18:15-17. (Unit 5 (b) p. 108)

At 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, the apostle Paul gave strong counsel that Christians should not take other Christians before secular courts to settle personal disputes that should be settled with the help of the congregation elders. (g83 2/8 pp. 13-15; w77 3/1 p. 147; w73 11/15 pp. 703-4)

For some disputes, a neutral brother, or elders, may act as arbitrator.

If an individual ignores God's Word on this matter, it *may* affect his congregation privileges.

However, there are legal matters over which the congregation does not have authority and which may therefore be taken to a secular court for judgment without violating the principle or the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. These include:

Getting a divorce decree, child custody and support, alimony.

Obtaining insurance compensation.

If a person suffers loss or is injured in or by an automobile owned by a spiritual brother, it might be necessary legally to sue the brother in order to obtain compensation from the brother's insurer.

Being listed among creditors in bankruptcy procedures.

Probating wills.

Certain countersuits. For example:

If a *worldly creditor* sues a brother, it might be necessary for the brother, for his own protection, to file a countersuit even though spiritual brothers are included in the action.

If a brother takes legal action against another baptized Witness, it would not be a violation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 for the one being sued to defend himself or to countersue. (This is true whether the matter was first taken before the elders or not.)

Jehovah's Witnesses *maintain neutrality* with regard to the political and military affairs of the nations. (John 17:16; *rs* pp. 269-76)

They do not interfere with what others do as to voting in political elections, running for or campaigning for political offices, joining nonneutral organizations, shouting political slogans, and so forth. (*w*86 9/1 pp. 19-20; *w*68 6/1 pp. 351-2)

Since true dedicated Christians are "no part of the world," if a member of the congregation unrepentantly pursues a course in violation of his Christian neutrality, he thereby disassociates himself from the neutral Christian congregation. (John 15:19; 17:14-16; *w*82 1/15 p. 31)

Elders should talk to one known to be contemplating taking such a course, since he may be doing so in ignorance. (Ps. 119:67; Gal. 6:1; 1 Tim. 1:13)

If he disregards the help proffered and pursues a course in violation of Christian neutrality, a committee should send the facts substantiating the disassociation to the branch office on the S-77 and S-79 forms.

Illustration: A plumb line must be carefully used if a building is to be erected properly. (Amos 7:7, 8; compare Zechariah 4:10.)

If any of Jehovah's people do not meet the test of uprightness in a spiritual way, Jehovah will mete out discipline with justice.

Decisions of elders must reflect justice in imitation of Jehovah's ways. (Isa. 32:1)

Jehovah tempers justice with mercy when this is warranted. (Ezek. 33:14-16)

Mercy is not limited to the withholding of measured punishment when justly due; it also expresses kind consideration or pity that brings relief to those who are disadvantaged and in need of help. (*it-2* p. 376)

Mercy lightens judgment, or punishment, and brings relief when circumstances allow for it. (Ps. 103:8-10; Jas. 2:13)

Mercy also involves the way in which needed correction and discipline are given.

Mercy takes into consideration such matters as motive, provocation, willingness to confess, temptation, mental and emotional condition, degree of spiritual progress made, past conduct, and present attitude of the offender.

Elders must guard against automatic or letter-of-the-law application of punishment for breaking God's laws.

Administering Christian law in justice and with mercy requires:

Decisions that are fair and appropriate to the need. (Isa. 28:24-28; *w76* 12/1 p. 719; *w75* 9/1 pp. 517-18)

Applying punishment to fit the violation.

Allowance for mercy when there are extenuating circumstances.

Enforcing with impartiality the laws that carry sanctions. (Deut. 1:16, 17)

Getting all the facts before making a decision. (Prov. 18:13, 17)

Avoiding becoming unnecessarily involved in personal disputes. (Prov. 26:17; see Unit 5 (b), page 108.)

Expelling (by disfellowshipping) those who flout God's household law and unrepentantly contaminate the congregation. (1 Cor. 5:9, 13; Titus 3:10)

Making clear to disfellowshipped ones that upon displaying works befitting repentance and turning around, they may apply for reinstatement. (2 Cor. 2:6-8)

Each judicial case is different and must be judged on its own merits.

Some people have inherited or acquired stronger faulty inclinations than others have and may therefore need more than the usual direction or counsel to correct their course. (Jonah 4:11; Mark 6:34)

Need for a Righteous Judiciary

Elders should make serious efforts to expand their ability to be righteous judges.

Use direction provided by the Society.

Be sure all decisions are solidly based on the Scriptures.

Before handling any judicial matter, wisely make a practice of carefully reviewing Units 5 (a), 5 (b), and 5 (c), taking special note of the cited scriptures.

When elders rely primarily on past experience or fail to review this material before handling a judicial matter, they frequently overlook important points.

Since the lives of all Christians are precious to Jehovah, the elders cannot afford to be careless or indifferent. You must "render an account." (Heb. 13:17)

Elders selected to serve on judicial or appeal committees should be outstandingly discerning and trustworthy men.

If the wrongdoer or one accused is known to have strong feelings respecting an elder being considered to serve, it would be better that the elder not serve.

An elder who is related to the accused person, has been in business with him, or has had a special friendship with him should not normally serve on the committee. (*km* 9/77 p. 6)

The judicial committee needs to be consistent, firm, and loving in its dealings and decisions.

Work interdependently as a committee. (1 Cor. 12: 21-25)

Listen to fellow members on the judicial committee; benefit from one another's observations.

God's spirit can direct any one of the elders to make a valuable contribution to the thinking of the judicial committee. (Prov. 27:17; Eccl. 4:9)

When questions arise, do not be hasty in deciding the matter. Do research in the Society's publications. If answers cannot be found and further direction is really needed, write to the Society; if the matter is urgent, telephone during business hours.

Elders serving as a committee of judges should imitate the example of Jehovah and Jesus, dealing impartially and justly with all persons. (Lev. 19:15; John 5:30; 8:28)

By your conscientiously exercising justice tempered by mercy, you give evidence that Jehovah's organization is governed by him. His theocratically organized people will therefore continue to grow in righteousness. (1 Sam. 12:22)