

Jehovah's Witnesses who Publicly Question, Doubt, Criticize, or Speak Out Against ANY Watchtower Society Policy or Teaching, will most likely be "Disfellowshipped" (Excommunicated) and Shunned by their Jehovah's Witness Family and Friends, and are then labeled as "Apostates", and the Watchtower Society teaches that if you are Disfellowshipped when Armageddon comes, God will eternally destroy you:

The Watchtower, March 1, 1952 Issue, Page 141:

Those who are acquainted with the situation in the congregation should never say 'Hello' or 'Goodby' to [the disfellowshipped person]. He is not welcome in our midst, we avoid him.

The Watchtower, October 1, 1952 Issue, Page 599:

"We must hate [the disfellowshipped person] in the truest sense, which is to regard with extreme active aversion, to consider [the disfellowshipped person] as loathsome, odious, filthy, to detest."

The Watchtower, November 15, 1952 Issue:

In the case of where a father or mother or son or daughter is disfellowshipped, how should such person be treated by members of the family in their family relationship?

We are not living today among theocratic nations where such members of our fleshly family relationship could be exterminated for apostasy from God and his theocratic organization, as was possible and was ordered in the nation of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai and in the land of Palestine. "Thou shalt surely kill him; thy hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him to death with stones, because he hath sought to draw thee away from Jehovah thy God, . . . And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is in the midst of thee."-- Deut. 13:6-11, AS.

Being limited by the laws of the worldly nation in which we live and also by the laws of God through Jesus Christ, we can take action against apostates only to a certain extent, that is, consistent with both sets of laws.

The law of the land and God's law through Christ forbid us to kill apostates, even though they be members of our own flesh-and-blood family relationship. However, God's law requires us to recognize their being disfellowshipped from his congregation, and this despite the fact that the law of the land in which we live requires us under some natural obligation to live with and have dealings with such apostates under the same roof.

...if the children are of age, then there can be a departing and breaking of family ties in a physical way, because the spiritual ties have already snapped.

If children are of age and continue to associate with a disfellowshipped parent because of receiving material support from him or her, then they must consider how far their spiritual interests are being endangered by continuing under this unequal arrangement, and whether they can arrange to support themselves, living apart from the fallen-away parent. Their continuing to receive material support should not make the compromise so as to ignore the disfellowshipped state of the parent. If, because of acting according to the disfellowship order of the company of God's people, they become threatened with a withdrawal of the parental support, then they must be willing to take such consequences.

Satan's influence through the disfellowshipped member of the family will be to cause the other member or members of the family who are in the truth to join the disfellowshipped member in his course or in his position toward God's organization. To do this would be disastrous, and so the faithful family member must recognize and conform to the disfellowship order. How would or could this be done while living under the same roof or in personal, physical contact daily with the disfellowshipped? In this way: By refusing to have religious relationship with the disfellowshipped.

...to have religious communion with the disfellowshipped person - no, there would be none of that! The faithful marriage partner would not discuss religion with the apostate or disfellowshipped and would not accompany that one to his (or her) place of religious association and participate in the meetings with that one. As Jesus said: "If he does not listen even to the congregation [which was obliged to disfellowship him], let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector [to Jehovah's sanctified nation]." (Matt. 18:17, NW) Hurt to such one would not be authorized, but there would be no spiritual or religious fellowshiping.

The same rule would apply to those who are in the relation of parent and child or of child and parent. What natural obligation falls upon them according to man's law and God's law the faithful parent or the faithful child will comply with. But as for rendering more than that and having religious fellowship with such one in violation of the congregation's disfellowship order-no, none of that for the faithful one! If the faithful suffers in some material or other way for the faithful adherence to theocratic law, then he must accept this as suffering for righteousness' sake.

The purpose of observing the disfellowship order is to make the disfellowshipped one realize the error of his way and to shame him, if possible, so that he may be recovered, and also to safeguard your own salvation to life in the new world in vindication of God. (2 Thess. 3:14, 15; Titus 2:8) Because of being in close, indissoluble natural family ties and being of the same household under the one roof you may have to eat material food and live physically with that one at home, in which case 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 and 2 John 10 could not apply; but do not defeat the purpose of the congregation's disfellowship order by eating spiritual or religious food with such one or receiving such one favorably in a religious way and bidding him farewell with a wish for his prosperity in his apostate course.

The Watchtower, December 1, 1952 Issue, Page 735:

Generally speaking, it would be desirable for us to have no contact with disfellowshipped persons, either in business or in social and spiritual ways.

The Watchtower, July 15, 1961 Issue, Page 420:

in order to hate what is bad a Christian must hate the [disfellowshipped] person

The Watchtower, July 1, 1963 Issue, Page 411:

[Disfellowshipping] serves as a powerful warning example to those in the congregation, since they will be able to see the disastrous consequences of ignoring Jehovah's laws. Paul said: "Reprove before all onlookers persons who practice sin, that the rest also may have fear." 1 Tim. 5:20.

The Watchtower, July 1, 1963 Issue, Page 413:

[The members of the congregation] will not converse with such one or show him recognition in any way. If the disfellowshipped person attempts to talk to others in the congregation, they should walk away from him. In this way he will feel the full import of his sin.... the disfellowshipped person who wants to do what is right should inform any approaching him in innocence that he is disfellowshipped and they should not be conversing with him.

The Watchtower, July 15, 1963 Issue, Pages 443-444:

In the case of the disfellowshipped relative who does not live in the same home, contact with him is also kept to what is absolutely necessary. As with secular employment, this contact is limited and even curtailed completely if at all possible.

We should not see how close we can get to relatives who are disfellowshipped from Jehovah's organization, but we should 'quit mixing in company' with them.

What if a person cut off from God's congregation unexpectedly visits dedicated relatives? What should the Christian do then? If this is the first occurrence of such visit, the dedicated Christian can, if his conscience permits, carry on family courtesies on that particular occasion. However, if his conscience does not permit, he is under no obligation to do so. If courtesies are extended, though, the Christian should make it clear that this will not be made a regular practice.... The excommunicated relative should be made to realize that his visits are not now welcomed as they were previously when he was walking correctly with Jehovah.

Page 446:

If the excommunicated husband insists on offering prayer at mealtimes, the dedicated members of the household would not say "Amen" to the prayer, nor would they join hands as some have the custom, as this would be participating spiritually. They could bow their heads and offer their own silent prayer to Jehovah.

Organization for Kingdom-Preaching and Disciple-Making Book (Published in 1972), Pages 172-173:

In faithfulness to God, none in the congregation should greet such [disfellowshipped] persons when meeting them in public nor should they welcome these into their homes.

The Watchtower, July 15, 1974 Issue, Page 442:

...do you know how to hate? These very strong words are an expression of godly hate, and you too must have this quality to be pleasing to God. Hate causes a feeling of disgust to well up inside you. You loathe, abhor, despise the object of your hatred

[...] [The disfellowshipped Jehovah's Witnesses are to be hated] in the sense of avoiding them as we would poison or a poisonous snake.

The Watchtower, August 1, 1980 Issue, Page 19:

Thus, the one who doubts to the point of becoming an apostate sets himself up as a judge. He thinks he knows better than his fellow Christians, better also than the 'faithful and discreet slave,' through whom he has learned the best part, if not all that he knows about Jehovah God and his purposes.

The Watchtower September 15th 1981 Issue, Pages 20-31:

Disfellowshipping-How to View It

"O Jehovah, . . . who will reside in your holy mountain? He who is walking faultlessly and practicing righteousness."-Ps. 15:1, 2.

JEHOVAH is righteous and holy. Though he is merciful and understanding with imperfect humans, he expects those worshipping him to reflect his holiness by trying to uphold his righteous standards.-Ps. 103:8-14; Num. 15:40 .

2 An Israelite who deliberately violated God's commands, such as those against apostasy, adultery or murder, was to be cut off, put to death. (Num. 15:30,31; 35:31; Deut. 13:1-5; Lev. 20:10) This firmness in upholding God's reasonable and just standards was good for all Israelites, for it helped to maintain the congregation's purity. And it served to deter anyone from spreading corruption among the people who had God's name on them.

3 In the first century C.E. the Jews under Roman rule did not have the authority to administer the death penalty. (John 18:28-31) But a Jew guilty of violating the Law could be expelled from the synagogue. An effect of this severe punishment was that other Jews would shun or avoid the expelled person. It is said that others would not even have commercial transactions with him beyond selling him the necessities of life.-John 9:22; 12:42 ; 16:2.

4 After the Christian congregation was formed, it replaced the Jewish nation in having God's name upon it. (Matt. 21:43; Acts 15:14) Accordingly, Christians could rightly be expected to uphold Jehovah's righteousness. The apostle Peter wrote: "In accord with the Holy One who called you, do you also become holy yourselves in all your conduct, because it is written: 'You must be holy, because I am holy.'" (1 Pet. 1:14-16) Jehovah loves his people and wants to protect the purity of the Christian congregation. So he outlined a provision to reject or expel a person who persists in a course that dishonors God and endangers the congregation.

5 The apostle Paul advised: "As for a man that promotes a sect, reject him after a first and a second admonition; knowing that such a man has been turned out of the way and is sinning, he being self-condemned." (Titus 3:10, 11) Yes, spiritual elders, such as Titus was, first try lovingly to help a wrongdoer. If he will not respond to their help and persists in a course of "sinning," they have authority to convoke a committee of elders to "judge the members of [the] fellowship." (1 Cor. 5:12, Today's English Version) Love for God and for the purity of his people requires that those in the "fellowship," the congregation, reject that man.

6 In the first century some of such wrongdoers arose. Hymenaeus and Alexander were of that sort, men who had "experienced shipwreck concerning their faith." Paul said: "I have handed them over to Satan that they may be taught by discipline not to blaspheme." (1 Tim. 1:19, 20) Expelling those two men was a severe chastisement, or discipline, a punishment that might teach them not to blaspheme the holy and living God. (Compare Luke 23:16, where the basic Greek word often rendered "discipline" is used.) It was proper that these blasphemers be turned over to the authority of Satan, cast into the darkness of the world under Satan's influence.-2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:17-19; 1 John 5:19; compare Acts 26:18.

HOW TO TREAT EXPELLED ONES

7 Some questions , however, may arise about how we should treat a former member who has been expelled. Thankfully, God has provided in his Word answers and directions that we can be sure are perfect, righteous and just.-Jer. 17:10; Deut. 32:4.

8 At one point a man in the Corinthian congregation was practicing immorality and evidently was unrepentant. Paul wrote that this man 'should be taken away from their midst,' for he was like a little leaven that could ferment, or corrupt, a whole mass. (1 Cor. 5:1, 2, 6) But, was he, when once expelled, to be treated as if he were just an average person of the world whom the Christians might meet in their neighborhood or daily life? Note what Paul said.

9 "I wrote you to quit mixing in company with fornicators, not meaning entirely with the fornicators of this world or the greedy persons and extortioners or idolaters. Otherwise, you would actually have to get out of the world." (1 Cor. 5:9, 10) In these words Paul realistically acknowledged that most persons whom we contact in our daily affairs have never known or followed God's way. They may be fornicators, extortioners or idolaters, so they are not persons whom Christians choose as regular, close associates. Still, we live on this planet among mankind and may have to be around such persons and speak to them on the job, at school, in the neighborhood.

10 In the next verse Paul contrasts this situation with how Christians should conduct themselves toward one who had been a Christian "brother" but who was expelled from the congregation because of wrongdoing: "But now I am writing you to quit mixing in company ["not associate," TEV] with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man."-1 Cor. 5:11.

11 The expelled person is not a mere man of the world who has not known God nor pursued a godly way of life. Rather, he has known the way of truth and righteousness, but he has left that way and unrepentantly

pursued sin to the point of having to be expelled. So he is to be treated differently. Peter commented on how such former Christians differ from an average "man on the street." The apostle said: "If, after having escaped from the defilements of the world by an accurate knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they get involved again with these very things and are overcome, the final conditions have become worse for them than the first. . . . The saying of the true proverb has happened to them: 'The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow that was bathed to rolling in the mire.'" -2 Pet. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 6:11.

12 Yes, the Bible commands Christians not to keep company or fellowship with a person who has been expelled from the congregation. Thus "disfellowshipping" is what Jehovah's Witnesses appropriately call the expelling and subsequent shunning of such an unrepentant wrongdoer. Their refusal to fellowship with an expelled person on any spiritual or social level reflects loyalty to God's standards and obedience to his command at 1 Corinthians 5:11, 13. This is consistent with Jesus' advice that such a person be considered in the same way as "a man of the nations" was viewed by the Jews of that time. For some time after the apostles died, those professing Christianity evidently followed the Biblical procedure. But how many churches today comply with God's clear directions in this regard?

THOSE WHO DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES

13 A Christian might grow spiritually weak, perhaps because of not studying God's Word regularly, having personal problems or experiencing persecution. (1 Cor. 11:30; Rom. 14:1) Such a one might cease to attend Christian meetings. What is to be done? Recall that the apostles abandoned Jesus on the night of his arrest. Yet Christ had urged Peter, "When once you have returned, strengthen your brothers [who also abandoned Jesus]." (Luke 22:32) Hence, out of love Christian elders and others might visit and help the one who has grown weak and inactive. (1 Thess. 5:14; Rom. 15:1; Heb. 12:12, 13) It is another matter, though, when a person repudiates his being a Christian and disassociates himself.

14 One who has been a true Christian might renounce the way of the truth, stating that he no longer considers himself to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses or wants to be known as one. When this rare event occurs, the person is renouncing his standing as a Christian, deliberately disassociating himself from the congregation. The apostle John wrote: "They went out from us, but they were not of our sort; for if they had been of our sort, they would have remained with us." -1 John 2:19.

15 Or, a person might renounce his place in the Christian congregation by his actions, such as by becoming part of an organization whose objective is contrary to the Bible, and, hence, is under judgment by Jehovah God. (Compare Revelation 19:17-21; Isaiah 2:4.) So if one who was a Christian chose to join those who are disapproved of God, it would be fitting for the congregation to acknowledge by a brief announcement that he had disassociated himself and is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

16 Persons who make themselves "not of our sort" by deliberately rejecting the faith and beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses should appropriately be viewed and treated as are those who have been disfellowshipped for wrongdoing.

COOPERATING WITH THE CONGREGATION

17 Though Christians enjoy spiritual fellowship when they discuss or study the Bible with their brothers or interested persons, they would not want to have such fellowship with an expelled sinner (or one who has renounced the faith and beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses, disassociating himself). The expelled person has been 'rejected,' being "self-condemned" because of "sinning," and those in the congregation both accept God's judgment and uphold it. Disfellowshipping, however, implies more than ceasing to have spiritual fellowship. - Titus 3:10, 11.

18 Paul wrote: "Quit mixing in company . . . , not even eating with such a man." (1 Cor. 5:11) A meal is a time of relaxation and socializing. Hence, the Bible here rules out social fellowship, too, such as joining an expelled person in a picnic or party, ball game, trip to the beach or theater, or sitting down to a meal with him. (The special problems involving a relative who has been disfellowshipped are considered in the following article.)

19 Sometimes a Christian might feel under considerable pressure to ignore this Bible advice. His own emotions may create the pressure, or it may be brought to bear on him by acquaintances. For instance, one brother was pressured to officiate at the marriage of two disfellowshipped persons. Could that service be rationalized as a mere kindness? One could feel that way. But why were his services wanted, rather than those of the town mayor or other state marrying agent? Was it not because of his standing as a minister of God and his ability to offer marriage counsel from God's Word? To give in to such pressure would involve him in fellowship with the couple, persons who had been expelled from the congregation for their ungodly way. -1 Cor. 5:13.

20 Other problems arise in connection with business or employment. What if you were employed by a man who now was expelled by the congregation, or you employed a person to whom that happened? What then? If you were contractually or financially obliged to continue the business relationship for the present, you certainly would now have a different attitude toward the disfellowshipped individual. Discussion of business matters with him or contact on the job might be necessary, but spiritual discussions and social fellowship would be things of the past. In that way you could demonstrate your obedience to God and have a protective

barrier for yourself. Also, this might impress on him how much his sin has cost him in various ways.-2 Cor. 6:14, 17.

SPEAK WITH A DISFELLOWSHIPED OR DISASSOCIATED PERSON?

21 Would upholding God's righteousness and his disfellowshipping arrangement mean that a Christian should not speak at all with an expelled person, not even saying "Hello"? Some have wondered about that, in view of Jesus' advice to love our enemies and not 'greet our brothers only.'-Matt. 5:43-47.

22 Actually, in his wisdom God did not try to cover every possible situation. What we need is to get the sense of what Jehovah says about treatment of a disfellowshipped person, for then we can strive to uphold His view. Through the apostle John, God explains:

"Everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God. . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him. For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works."-2 John 9-11.

23 The apostle who gave that wise warning was close to Jesus and knew well what Christ had said about greeting others. He also knew that the common greeting of that time was "Peace." As distinct from some personal "enemy" or worldly man in authority who opposed Christians, a disfellowshipped or disassociated person who is trying to promote or justify his apostate thinking or is continuing in his ungodly conduct is certainly not one to whom to wish "Peace." (1 Tim. 2:1, 2) And we all know from our experience over the years that a simple "Hello" to someone can be the first step that develops into a conversation and maybe even a friendship. Would we want to take that first step with a disfellowshipped person?

24 'But what if he seems to be repentant and needs encouragement?' someone might wonder. There is a provision for handling such situations. The overseers in the congregation serve as spiritual shepherds and protectors of the flock. (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2) If a disfellowshipped or disassociated person inquires, or gives evidence of wanting to come back into God's favor, the elders can speak to him. They will kindly explain what he needs to do and might give him some appropriate admonition. They can deal with him on the basis of facts about his past sin and his attitude. Others in the congregation lack such information. So if someone felt that the disfellowshipped or disassociated person 'is repentant,' might that be a judgment based on impression rather than accurate information? If the overseers were convinced that the person was repentant and was producing the fruits of repentance, he would be reinstated into the congregation. After that occurs, the rest of the congregation can warmly welcome him at the meetings, display forgiveness, comfort him and confirm their love for him, as Paul urged the Corinthians to do with the man reinstated at Corinth.-2 Cor. 2:5-8.

NOT SHARING IN WICKED WORKS

25 All faithful Christians need to take to heart the serious truth that God inspired John to write: "He that says a greeting to [an expelled sinner who is promoting an erroneous teaching or carrying on ungodly conduct] is a sharer in his wicked works."-2 John 11.

26 Many of Christendom's commentators take exception to 2 John 11. They claim that it is 'unchristian counsel, contrary to the spirit of our Lord,' or that it encourages intolerance. Yet such sentiments emanate from religious organizations that do not apply God's command to "remove the wicked man from among yourselves," that seldom if ever expel even notorious wrongdoers from their churches. (1 Cor. 5:13) Their "tolerance" is unscriptural, unchristian.-Matt. 7:21 -23; 25:24-30; John 8:44.

27 But it is not wrong to be loyal to the righteous and just God of the Bible. He tells us that he will accept 'in his holy mountain' only those who walk faultlessly, practice righteousness and speak truth. (Ps. 15:1-5) If, though, a Christian were to throw in his lot with a wrongdoer who has been rejected by God and disfellowshipped, or has disassociated himself, that would be as much as saying 'I do not want a place in God's holy mountain either.' If the elders saw him heading in that direction by regularly keeping company with a disfellowshipped person, they would lovingly and patiently try to help him to regain God's view. (Matt. 18:18; Gal. 6:1) They would admonish him and, if necessary, 'reprove him with severity.' They want to help him remain 'in God's holy mountain.' But if he will not cease to fellowship with the expelled person, he thus has made himself 'a sharer (supporting or participating) in the wicked works' and must be removed from the congregation, expelled.-Titus 1:13; Jude 22, 23; compare Numbers 16:26.

LOYAL TO GOD'S VIEW

28 Loyalty to Jehovah God and his provisions is a source of happiness, for all his ways are righteous, just and good. This is true, too, concerning his provision to disfellowship unrepentant wrongdoers. As we cooperate with that arrangement, we can trust in David 's words: "Take knowledge that Jehovah will certainly distinguish his loyal one." (Ps. 4:3) Yes, God sets apart, honors and guides those who are loyal to him and his ways. Among the many blessings we receive from such loyalty is the joy of being among those whom God approves and accepts 'in his holy mountain.'-Ps. 84:10, 11.

If a Relative Is Disfellowshipped . . .

AFTER Adam had been alone for some time, God said: "It is not good for the man to continue by himself." Then He created Eve and instituted human marriage. (Gen. 2:18, 21, 22) Thereafter, earth's population was to grow. So each person would come to have many relatives. Even if some family members, such as children, did not live nearby they could be visited and pleasant times shared.-Gen. 1:28; Job 1:1-5.

2 God had purposed that families should be united in true worship, so religious beliefs would not create any divisions. But incidents occurred in which religion became a family issue. One of these was when Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebelled. Jehovah confirmed that he was dealing through Moses and Aaron, not through these religious rebels. Then Moses told the people to get away from the rebels' tents. What would the children and households of Korah, Dathan and Abiram do? Would they put loyalty to family ahead of loyalty to Jehovah and his congregation? Most of those closely related to the rebels put family before God. Jehovah executed these relatives along with the rebels.-Num. 16:16-33.

3 However, some of Korah's sons remained loyal to God and His people. They were not executed along with the rest of Korah's household and the families of Dathan and Abiram. (Num. 26:9-11) In fact, descendants of these surviving Korahites were later blessed with special service at the temple and mentioned with honor in the Bible.-2 Chron. 20:14-19; Ps. 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87.

4 A similar decision between loyalty to family and loyalty to God was faced when an Israelite became an apostate. Would his family, moved by human emotion or blood ties, try to shield him from being cut off? Or would even his brother, son or daughter realize that loyalty to God and the congregation was the right and wise course? (See Deuteronomy 13:6-11.) In the Christian arrangement today a sinner is not cut off by execution, but Christians may face tests because of a relative's being disciplined.

RELATIVES MAY CAUSE PROBLEMS

5 Family connections and affection can be very strong. This is natural and is in accord with God's arrangement. (John 16:21) But these strong ties can also bring a difficult test on Christians. Jesus explained that one effect of a person's becoming a Christian would be that relatives might oppose. Jesus said: "I came to put, not peace, but a sword. For I came to cause division, with a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a young wife against her mother-in-law. Indeed, a man's enemies will be persons of his own household. He that has greater affection for father or mother than for me is not worthy of me."-Matt. 10:34-38.

6 Christians do not want such enmity to exist. And there is no reason why relatives should oppose or hate them for having become clean, moral, honest servants of God. Yet true Christians realize that they cannot put family before God. In the long run, what is in everyone's best interest is for Christians to continue faithful to God. In time they may be able to influence their relatives to walk on the way leading to salvation.-Rom. 9:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:12-16.

7 Relatives may also cause problems for true Christians in another way. This may develop when a relative is disfellowshipped. As discussed in the preceding articles, if a person in the congregation unrepentantly practices gross sin, God requires that he be disfellowshipped. (1 Cor. 5:11-13) The conduct of the wrongdoer has changed his relationship with Jehovah and therefore with family members who are Jehovah's Witnesses. God is not to blame for these results, because his standards are righteous and just. (Job 34:10, 12) Nor does the fault rest with the faithful Christian relatives. It is the disfellowshipped person who has made problems for himself and for his relatives, as did Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

8 We need to examine two distinct situations. The first is where a Christian lives in the same household with a disfellowshipped or disassociated family member. The second is where such a relative is not in the immediate family circle.

IN THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY CIRCLE

9 A person might become a Christian without others in that one's family circle accepting the faith. For instance, a wife might be serving Jehovah, but her husband not. Despite that, she is still "one flesh" with her husband and is obliged to love and respect him. (Gen. 2:24; 1 Pet. 3:1-6) Or she might be married to a man who was a dedicated Christian but was later expelled from the congregation. Yet that would not end their marital ties; only death or a Scriptural divorce would do that.-1 Cor. 7:39; Matt. 19:9.

10 Similarly, if a relative, such as a parent, son or daughter, is disfellowshipped or has disassociated himself, blood and family ties remain. Does that mean, then, that in the family circle everything remains the same when one member is disfellowshipped? Definitely not.

11 A disfellowshipped person has been spiritually cut off from the congregation; the former spiritual ties have been completely severed. This is true even with respect to his relatives, including those within his immediate family circle. Thus, family members-while acknowledging family ties-will no longer have any spiritual fellowship with him.-1 Sam. 28:6; Prov. 15:8, 9.

12 That will mean changes in the spiritual fellowship that may have existed in the home. For example, if the husband is disfellowshipped, his wife and children will not be comfortable with him conducting a family Bible study or leading in Bible reading and prayer. If he wants to say a prayer, such as at mealtime, he has a right to do so in his own home. But they can silently offer their own prayers to God. (Prov. 28:9; Ps. 119:145, 146) What if a disfellowshipped person in the home wants to be present when the family reads the Bible together or has a Bible study? The others might let him be present to listen if he will not try to teach them or share his religious ideas.

13 If a minor child is disfellowshipped, the parents will still care for his physical needs and provide moral training and discipline. They would not conduct a Bible study directly with the child, with him participating.

Yet this does not mean that he would not be required to sit in on the family study. And they might direct attention to parts of the Bible or Christian publications that contain counsel he needs. (Prov. 1:8-19; 6:20-22; 29:17; Eph. 6:4) They can have him accompany them to and sit with them at Christian meetings, hoping that he will take to heart Biblical counsel.

14 But what if a close relative, such as a son or a parent who does not live in the home, is disfellowshipped and subsequently wants to move back there? The family could decide what to do depending on the situation.

15 For example, a disfellowshipped parent may be sick or no longer able to care for himself financially or physically. The Christian children have a Scriptural and moral obligation to assist. (1 Tim. 5:8) Perhaps it seems necessary to bring the parent into the home, temporarily or permanently. Or it may appear advisable to arrange for care where there is medical personnel but where the parent would have to be visited. What is done may depend on factors such as the parent's true needs, his attitude and the regard the head of the household has for the spiritual welfare of the household.

16 This could be true also with regard to a child who had left home but is now disfellowshipped or disassociated. Sometimes Christian parents have accepted back into the home for a time a disfellowshipped child who has become physically or emotionally ill. But in each case the parents can weigh the individual circumstances. Has a disfellowshipped son lived on his own, and is he now unable to do so? Or does he want to move back primarily because it would be an easier life? What about his morals and attitude? Will he bring "leaven" into the home?-Gal. 5:9.

17 In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, the father ran to meet and then accepted his returning son. The father, seeing the lad's pitiful condition, responded with natural parental concern. We can note, though, that the son did not bring home harlots or come with a disposition to continue his sinful life in his father's home. No, he expressed heartfelt repentance and evidently was determined to return to living a clean life.-Luke 15:11-32.

DISFELLOWSHIPED RELATIVES NOT LIVING AT HOME

18 The second situation that we need to consider is that involving a disfellowshipped or disassociated relative who is not in the immediate family circle or living at one's home. Such a person is still related by blood or marriage, and so there may be some limited need to care for necessary family matters. Nonetheless, it is not as if he were living in the same home where contact and conversation could not be avoided. We should keep clearly in mind the Bible's inspired direction: "Quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person . . . , not even eating with such a man."-1 Cor. 5:11.

19 Consequently, Christians related to such a disfellowshipped person living outside the home should strive to avoid needless association, even keeping business dealings to a minimum. The reasonableness of this course becomes apparent from reports of what has occurred where relatives have taken the mistaken view, 'Though he is disfellowshipped, we are related and so can treat him the same as before.' From one area comes this: "One person who was disfellowshipped was related to about one third of the congregation. All of his relations continued to associate with him."

And a highly respected Christian elder writes:

"In our area some disfellowshipped ones with large families have been met, as they enter the lobby of the Kingdom Hall, with a fanfare of backslapping and handshaking (even though the disfellowshipped one was known by them to be still living immorally). I feel a deep concern that those who have been disfellowshipped need to see that their course is hated by Jehovah and by his people and that they should feel a real need to become genuinely repentant. What will help these disfellowshipped ones to change when they are continually greeted by all in their large families who know of their practices?"

20 There must have been congregations in the first century where many were related. But when someone was disfellowshipped, were all the relatives to carry on as normal as long as they did not discuss Scriptural matters with the disfellowshipped person? No. Otherwise the congregation would not really be applying the command: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."-1 Cor. 5:13.

21 Great care needs to be exercised that a person's situation as a disfellowshipped sinner is neither overlooked nor minimized. As the sons of Korah well demonstrated, our chief loyalty must be to Jehovah and his theocratic arrangement. We can be sure that when we uphold his standards and prefer association with his organized people, rather than with wrongdoers, we will have his protection and blessing.-Ps. 84:10-12.

SOCIAL GATHERINGS AND DISFELLOWSHIPED RELATIVES

22 Normally, relatives are often together at meals, picnics, family reunions or other social gatherings. But when someone has unrepentantly pursued sin and has had to be disfellowshipped, he may cause difficulties for his Christian relatives in regard to such gatherings. While they realize that they are still related to him, they do not want to ignore Paul's advice that faithful Christians should "quit mixing in company" with an expelled sinner.

23 There is no point in looking for some rule as to family members being at gatherings where a disfellowshipped relative might be present. This would be something for those concerned to resolve, in keeping with Paul's counsel. (1 Cor. 5:11) And yet it should be appreciated that if a disfellowshipped person is going to be at a gathering to which nonrelative Witnesses are invited, that may well affect what others do. For

example, a Christian couple might be getting married at a Kingdom Hall. If a disfellowshipped relative comes to the Kingdom Hall for the wedding, obviously he could not be in the bridal party there or "give away" the bride. What, though, if there is a wedding feast or reception? This can be a happy social occasion, as it was in Cana when Jesus attended. (John 2:1, 2) But will the disfellowshipped relative be allowed to come or even be invited? If he was going to attend, many Christians, relatives or not, might conclude that they should not be there, to eat and associate with him, in view of Paul's directions at 1 Corinthians 5:11.

24 Thus, sometimes Christians may not feel able to have a disfellowshipped or disassociated relative present for a gathering that normally would include family members. Still, the Christians can enjoy the association of the loyal members of the congregation, having in mind Jesus' words: "Whoever does the will of God, this one is my brother and sister and mother."-Mark 3:35 .

25 The fact is that when a Christian gives himself over to sin and has to be disfellowshipped, he forfeits much: his approved standing with God; membership in the happy congregation of Christians; sweet fellowship with the brothers, including much of the association he had with Christian relatives. (1 Pet. 2:17) The pain he has caused may even survive him.

26 Should he die while disfellowshipped, arrangements for his funeral may be a problem. His Christian relatives may like to have had a talk at the Kingdom Hall, if that is the local custom. But that would not be fitting for a person expelled from the congregation. If he had been giving evidence of repentance and wanting God's forgiveness, such as by ceasing to practice sin and by attending Christian meetings, some brother's conscience might allow him to give a Bible talk at the funeral home or grave site. Such Biblical comments about the condition of the dead provide a witness to unbelievers or comfort to the relatives. However, if the disfellowshipped person had still been advocating false teachings or ungodly conduct, even such a talk would not be appropriate.-2 John 9-11.

LESSONS FOR ALL OF US

27 All of us need to appreciate that it is Jehovah's judgment that counts. (Prov. 29:26) That is true as to hateful practices, for the Bible shows that these are things that God detests. (Prov. 6:16-19) But it is also true as to his judgment of individuals. Jehovah's Word plainly says that "unrighteous persons," those carrying on the "works of the flesh," will not inherit his kingdom. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:19-21) Such persons have no place in heaven, nor will they fit in the earthly realm of the Kingdom. Accordingly, anyone who wants to remain in the clean congregation of God today must meet His standards. God simply will not permit "leaven" to remain as a corrupting influence among his holy people.-1 Cor. 5:6-13.

28 Naturally, if a close relative is disfellowshipped, human emotions can pose a major test for us. Sentiment and family ties are particularly strong between parents and their children, and they are also powerful when a marriage mate is disfellowshipped. Still, we must recognize that, in the final analysis, we will not benefit anyone or please God if we allow emotion to lead us into ignoring His wise counsel and guidance. We need to display our complete confidence in the perfect righteousness of God's ways, including his provision to disfellowship unrepentant wrongdoers. If we remain loyal to God and to the congregation, the wrongdoer may in time take a lesson from that, repent and be reinstated in the congregation. Yet, whether that occurs or not, we can draw comfort and strength from what David said late in life:

"All [God's] judicial decisions are in front of me; . . . And let Jehovah repay me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in front of his eyes. With someone loyal you will act in loyalty; with the faultless, mighty one you will deal faultlessly; with the one keeping clean you will show yourself clean . . . And the humble people you will save."-2 Sam. 22:23-28.

The Watchtower, January 1, 1983 Issue, Pages 30-31:

Questions From Readers

· How can we assist those in our congregation who have a disfellowshipped relative?

It is fine when elders and others give warm and loving consideration to Christians who are in this situation, for by showing kindness and understanding they can help to counteract the emotional and spiritual strain the situation may produce. Yet Christians having a disfellowshipped relative, and those who want to help, need to have a clear and proper view of disfellowshipping.

God's Word directs the congregation to expel those who unrepentantly practice sin. (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) This protects the congregation in general from contamination and upholds its good name. But on a personal basis loyal Christians in the family, and others wanting to help them, need protection too. We can appreciate why by considering what a person's being disfellowshipped reveals about his heart condition. Note the following two situations in connection with disfellowshipping:

First, when a person has committed a serious sin for which he might lose God's favor and be disfellowshipped, a committee of spiritual elders meets with him. He may already have realized the wrongness of his course, repented in his heart and begun to produce "works that befit repentance." (Acts 26:20) When that is so, the elders will reprove him with God's Word, will offer Biblical advice on 'making straight paths for his feet' and will pray with him and for him. Since he is repentant, he need not be expelled or viewed as disfellowshipped by his family or others.-1 Timothy 5:20; Hebrews 12:13; James 5:14-16.

Second, it may be that when the committee meets with the sinner, he has not yet repented. During the meeting the elders may be able to touch his heart, bringing home to him the gravity of his sin. (Compare 2 Samuel 12:1-13.) Of course, since he has not up till then produced any 'fruit that befits repentance,' the elders should exercise real caution to make sure that he is not merely sorry or ashamed over being found out. (Luke 3:8) Being concerned about the congregation, they should be absolutely convinced that he is now truly repentant and ready to "turn to God by doing works that befit repentance." (Acts 26:20) If they are convinced that he is repentant, he may remain in the congregation and be helped by the elders, his family and others.

What is the point of mentioning these two aspects? It is to illustrate that if someone is disfellowshipped, he must at the time have had a truly bad heart and/or been determined to pursue a God-dishonoring course. Peter said that the condition of such a person is worse than before he became a Christian; he is like 'a sow that was bathed but has gone back to rolling in the mire.' (2 Peter 2:20-22) This should help Christian relatives and others to have God's view of a disfellowshipped person.

But human emotions and attachments can have a powerful effect, making it difficult for people to act in accord with the disfellowshipping decree if a relative is involved. (Compare Numbers 16:16 -33.) For example, a faithful Christian wife realizes that her husband's being disfellowshipped means that the spiritual ties that formerly existed have been severed. He has, by his conduct and its results, broken a spiritual bond between himself and true Christians. His wife will continue to show love and respect for him as husband and family head, even as do wives whose husbands never were believers. (1 Peter 3:1, 2) But it will not be possible to have spiritual fellowship with him, sharing in Bible discussions and prayer with him as she once did. (Proverbs 28:9) She certainly will feel this loss.

Another sort of loss may be felt by loyal Christian grandparents whose children have been disfellowshipped. They may have been accustomed to visiting regularly with their children, giving them occasion to enjoy their grandchildren. Now the parents are disfellowshipped because of rejecting Jehovah's standards and ways. So things are not the same in the family. Of course, the grandparents have to determine if some necessary family matters require limited contact with the disfellowshipped children. And they might sometimes have the grandchildren visit them. How sad, though, that by their unchristian course the children interfere with the normal pleasure that such grandparents enjoyed!

These examples show why fellow Christians should be alert to the special need that may exist when someone in the congregation has had a close relative disfellowshipped. The apostle Paul urged Christians to "speak consolingly to the depressed souls," which might well describe the loyal Christian family member.

(1 Thessalonians 5:14) Nor should we limit our comforting, encouraging words to a single expression when the disfellowshipping occurs. The need for upbuilding may extend for a long while. In a sense, it may grow as the faithful one is for a long period of time deprived of spiritual fellowship with the family member. Of course, it is not necessary for us to keep mentioning disfellowshipping in conversation. We just need to go out of our way to be warm, genuinely interested and, above all, spiritual.-Proverbs 15:23; Ecclesiastes 12:10.

Much good can also be accomplished by providing Christian association. Sometimes a Christian whose mate has been disfellowshipped feels isolated. As mentioned above, the expelled mate has proved that he is not the sort of person that we want to be around. And we need to be careful not to get involved in fellowshiping with him just because we want to visit or help the Christian mate. So maybe a visit can be made when the disfellowshipped one is known to be out of the house.

We need to help our brothers and sisters who have disfellowshipped relatives to see the truthfulness of the inspired words: "There exists a friend sticking closer than a [fleshly] brother," or other fleshly relative. (Proverbs 18:24) We may not be able to undo all the hurt or make up for all the loss that the disfellowshipped person has caused his Christian relatives. Yet, by being aware of the special needs such Christians have "we may be able to comfort those in any sort of tribulation," including this one. And lovingly we can strengthen those who have this special need.-2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; Hebrews 12:12, 13.

The Watchtower, April 15, 1984 Issue, Page 15:

In Bible times, there usually was a "friend of the bridegroom" and female companions of the bride. (John 3:29; Psalm 45:14) This is also often the case at Kingdom Hall weddings. Reasonableness, though, is needed as to how many such participants there are, as well as how they dress and act. It would be unfitting to have in the wedding party people who are disfellowshipped or whose scandalous life-style grossly conflicts with Bible principles. (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

The Watchtower, December 15, 1984 Issue, Page 19:

We have been forewarned that there will be apostates and people who just like to have their ears tickled. Counsel such as at 2 John 9-11, 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 and 2 Timothy 3:5 allows no room for associating with those who turn away from the truth. Nor do we purchase or read their writings.

Page 31:

Such ones willfully abandoning the Christian congregation thereby become part of the "antichrist." (1 John 2:18, 19)

A person who had willfully and formally disassociated himself from the congregation would have matched that description.

The Watchtower, March 15, 1986 Issue, Page 12:

Now, what will you do if you are confronted with apostate teaching - subtle reasonings - claiming that what you believe as one of Jehovah's Witnesses is not the truth? For example, what will you do if you receive a letter or some literature, open it and see right away that it is from an apostate? Will curiosity cause you to read it, just to see what he has to say? You may even reason: "It won't affect me; I'm too strong in the truth. And, besides, if we have the truth, we have nothing to fear. The truth will stand the test." In thinking this way, some have fed their minds upon apostate reasoning and have fallen prey to serious questioning and doubt.

Do you wisely destroy apostate material?

Page 14:

Why is reading apostate publications similar to reading pornographic literature?

Page 17:

Beware of those who try to put forward their own contrary opinions.

Page 20:

Therefore, resolve in your heart that you will never even touch the poison that apostates want you to sip."

The Watchtower, April 1, 1986 Issue, Pages 30-31:

Questions From Readers

· Why have Jehovah's Witnesses disfellowshipped (excommunicated) for apostasy some who still profess belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ?

Those who voice such an objection point out that many religious organizations claiming to be Christian allow dissident views. Even some clergymen disagree with basic teachings of their church, yet they remain in good standing. In nearly all the denominations of Christendom, there are modernists and fundamentalists who greatly disagree with one another as to the inspiration of the Scriptures.

However, such examples provide no grounds for our doing the same. Why not? Many of such denominations allow widely divergent views among the clergy and the laity because they feel they cannot be certain as to just what is Bible truth. They are like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day who were unable to speak as persons having authority, which is how Jesus taught. (Matthew 7:29) Moreover, to the extent that religionists believe in interfaith, they are obligated not to take divergent beliefs too seriously.

But taking such a view of matters has no basis in the Scriptures. Jesus did not make common cause with any of the sects of Judaism. Jews of those sects professed to believe in the God of creation and in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly the Law of Moses. Still, Jesus told his disciples to "watch out . . . for the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:11 , 12; 23:15) Note also how strongly the apostle Paul stated matters: "Even if we or an angel out of heaven were to declare to you as good news something beyond what we declared to you as good news, let him be accursed." Paul then repeated that statement for emphasis.- Galatians 1:8, 9.

Teaching dissident or divergent views is not compatible with true Christianity, as Paul makes clear at 1 Corinthians 1:10: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (New International Version) At Ephesians 4:3-6 he further stated that Christians should be "earnestly endeavoring to observe the oneness of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace. One body there is, and one spirit, even as you were called in the one hope to which you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all persons."

Was this unity to be achieved and maintained by each one's independently searching the Scriptures, coming to his own conclusions, and then teaching these? Not at all! Through Jesus Christ, Jehovah God provided for this purpose "some as apostles, . . . some as evangelizers, some as shepherds and teachers . . . until we all attain to the oneness in the faith and in the accurate knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man." Yes, with the help of such ministers, congregational unity-oneness in teaching and activity-could be and would be possible.-Ephesians 4:11-13.

Obviously, a basis for approved fellowship with Jehovah's Witnesses cannot rest merely on a belief in God, in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and so forth. The Roman Catholic pope, as well as the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury , professes such beliefs, yet their church memberships are exclusive of each other. Likewise, simply professing to have such beliefs would not authorize one to be known as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Approved association with Jehovah's Witnesses requires accepting the entire range of the true teachings of the Bible, including those Scriptural beliefs that are unique to Jehovah's Witnesses. What do such beliefs include?

That the great issue before humankind is the rightfulness of Jehovah's sovereignty, which is why he has allowed wickedness so long. (Ezekiel 25:17) That Jesus Christ had a prehuman existence and is subordinate to his heavenly Father. (John 14:28) That there is a "faithful and discreet slave" upon earth today 'entrusted with all of Jesus' earthly interests,' which slave is associated with the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. (Matthew 24:45-47) That 1914 marked the end of the Gentile Times and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the heavens, as well as the time for Christ's foretold presence. (Luke 21:7-24; Revelation 11:15-12:10) That only 144,000 Christians will receive the heavenly reward. (Revelation 14:1, 3) That Armageddon, referring to the battle of the great day of God the Almighty, is near. (Revelation 16:14, 16; 19:11-21) That it will be followed by Christ's Millennial Reign, which will restore an earth-wide paradise. That the first to enjoy it will be the present "great crowd" of Jesus' "other sheep."-John 10:16; Revelation 7:9-17; 21:3, 4.

Do we have Scriptural precedent for taking such a strict position? Indeed we do! Paul wrote about some in his day: "Their word will spread like gangrene. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of that number. These very men have deviated from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already occurred; and they are subverting the faith of some." (2 Timothy 2:17, 18; see also Matthew 18:6.) There is nothing to indicate that these men did not believe in God, in the Bible, in Jesus' sacrifice. Yet, on this one basic point, what they were teaching as to the time of the resurrection, Paul rightly branded them as apostates, with whom faithful Christians would not fellowship.

Similarly, the apostle John termed as antichrists those who did not believe that Jesus had come in the flesh. They may well have believed in God, in the Hebrew Scriptures, in Jesus as God's Son, and so on. But on this point, that Jesus had actually come in the flesh, they disagreed and thus were termed "antichrist." John goes on to say regarding those holding such variant views: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him. For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works."-2 John 7, 10, 11.

Following such Scriptural patterns, if a Christian (who claims belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus) unrepentantly promotes false teachings, it may be necessary for him to be expelled from the congregation. (See Titus 3:10, 11.) Of course, if a person just has doubts or is uninformed on a point, qualified ministers will lovingly assist him. This accords with the counsel: "Continue showing mercy to some that have doubts; save them by snatching them out of the fire." (Jude 22, 23) Hence, the true Christian congregation cannot rightly be accused of being harshly dogmatic, but it does highly value and work toward the unity encouraged in God's Word.

The Watchtower, April 15, 1988 Issue, Pages 26-31:

Discipline That Can Yield Peaceable Fruit

"No discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but grievous; yet afterward to those who have been trained by it it yields peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness."-HEBREWS 12:11.

THINK back to your childhood days. Can you recall your parents disciplining you? Most of us can. The apostle Paul used that as an illustration when commenting on discipline from God, as we read at Hebrews 12:9-11. 2 God's fatherly discipline, which can affect our spiritual lives, can take many forms. One is his arrangement to exclude from the Christian congregation a person who no longer wants to live by God's standards, or who refuses to do so. A person who is thus strongly chastised or disciplined may repent and turn around. In the process, the congregation of loyal ones are also disciplined in that they learn the importance of conforming to God's high standards.-1 Timothy 1:20.

3 'But,' someone may ask, 'is it not harsh to expel and then refuse to talk with the expelled person?' Such a view surfaced in a recent court case involving a woman who was raised by parents who were Jehovah's Witnesses. Her parents had been disfellowshipped. She was not, but she voluntarily disassociated herself by writing a letter withdrawing from the congregation. Accordingly, the congregation was simply informed that she was no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses. She moved away, but years later she returned and found that local Witnesses would not converse with her. So she took the matter to court. What was the outcome, and how might this affect you? In order to understand the matter properly, let us see what the Bible says about the related subject of disfellowshipping.

Why This Firm Stand?

4 Most true Christians loyally support God and his righteous laws. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-7; Hebrews 6:10) Occasionally, though, a person deviates from the path of truth. For example, despite help from Christian elders, he may unrepentantly violate God's laws. Or he may reject the faith by teaching false doctrine or by disassociating himself from the congregation. Then what should be done? Such things occurred even while the apostles were alive; hence, let us see what they wrote about this.

5 When a man in Corinth was unrepentantly immoral, Paul told the congregation: "Quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man." (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) The same was to occur with apostates, such as Hymenaeus: "As for a man that promotes a sect, reject him after a first and a second

admonition; knowing that such a man has been turned out of the way and is sinning." (Titus 3:10, 11; 1 Timothy 1:19, 20) Such shunning would be appropriate, too, for anyone who rejects the congregation: "They went out from us, but they were not of our sort; for if they had been of our sort, they would have remained with us. But they went out that it might be shown up that not all are of our sort."-1 John 2:18, 19. 6 Hopefully, such a one will repent so that he can be accepted back. (Acts 3:19) But meanwhile, may Christians have limited fellowship with him, or is strict avoidance necessary? If so, why? Cut Off Thoroughly?

7 Christians do not hold themselves aloof from people. We have normal contacts with neighbors, workmates, schoolmates, and others, and witness to them even if some are 'fornicators, greedy persons, extortioners, or idolaters.' Paul wrote that we cannot avoid them completely, 'otherwise we would have to get out of the world.' He directed that it was to be different, though, with "a brother" who lived like that: "Quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that [has returned to such ways], not even eating with such a man."-1 Corinthians 5:9-11; Mark 2:13-17.

8 In the apostle John's writings, we find similar counsel that emphasizes how thoroughly Christians are to avoid such ones: "Everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him. For he that says a greeting [Greek, *khairō*] to him is a sharer in his wicked works."-2 John 9-11.

9 Why is such a firm stand appropriate even today? Well, reflect on the severe cutting off mandated in God's Law to Israel . In various serious matters, willful violators were executed. (Leviticus 20:10; Numbers 15:30, 31) When that happened, others, even relatives, could no longer speak with the dead lawbreaker. (Leviticus 19:1-4; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 17:1-7) Though loyal Israelites back then were normal humans with emotions like ours, they knew that God is just and loving and that his Law protected their moral and spiritual cleanness. So they could accept that his arrangement to cut off wrongdoers was fundamentally a good and right thing.-Job 34:10-12.

10 We can be just as sure that God's arrangement that Christians refuse to fellowship with someone who has been expelled for unrepentant sin is a wise protection for us. "Clear away the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, according as you are free from ferment." (1 Corinthians 5:7) By also avoiding persons who have deliberately disassociated themselves, Christians are protected from possible critical, unappreciative, or even apostate views.-Hebrews 12:15, 16.

What About Relatives?

11 God certainly realizes that carrying out his righteous laws about cutting off wrongdoers often involves and affects relatives. As mentioned above, when an Israelite wrongdoer was executed, no more family association was possible. In fact, if a son was a drunkard and a glutton, his parents were to bring him before the judges, and if he was unrepentant, the parents were to share in the just executing of him, 'to clear away what is bad from the midst of Israel .' (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) You can appreciate that this would not have been easy for them. Imagine, too, how the wrongdoer's brothers, sisters, or grandparents felt. Yet, their putting loyalty to their righteous God before family affection could be lifesaving for them.

12 Recall the case of Korah, a leader in rebellion against God's leadership through Moses. In his perfect justice, Jehovah saw that Korah had to die. But all loyal ones were advised: "Turn aside, please, from before the tents of these wicked men and do not touch anything that belongs to them, that you may not be swept away in all their sin." Relatives who would not accept God's warning died with the rebels. But some of Korah's relatives wisely chose to be loyal to Jehovah, which saved their lives and led to future blessings.-Numbers 16:16-33; 26:9-11; 2 Chronicles 20:19.

13 Cutting off from the Christian congregation does not involve immediate death, so family ties continue. Thus, a man who is disfellowshipped or who disassociates himself may still live at home with his Christian wife and faithful children. Respect for God's judgments and the congregation's action will move the wife and children to recognize that by his course, he altered the spiritual bond that existed between them. Yet, since his being disfellowshipped does not end their blood ties or marriage relationship, normal family affections and dealings can continue.

14 The situation is different if the disfellowshipped or disassociated one is a relative living outside the immediate family circle and home. It might be possible to have almost no contact at all with the relative. Even if there were some family matters requiring contact, this certainly would be kept to a minimum, in line with the divine principle: "Quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person [or guilty of another gross sin], . . . not even eating with such a man."-1 Corinthians 5:11.

15 Understandably, this may be difficult because of emotions and family ties, such as grandparents' love for their grandchildren. Yet, this is a test of loyalty to God, as stated by the sister quoted on page 26. Anyone who is feeling the sadness and pain that the disfellowshipped relative has thus caused may find comfort and be encouraged by the example set by some of Korah's relatives.-Psalm 84:10-12.

The Court Decision

16 You may want to know the outcome of the court case involving a woman who was upset because former acquaintances would not converse with her after she chose to reject the faith, disassociating herself from the congregation.

17 Before the case went to trial, a federal district court summarily granted judgment against her. That judgment was based on the concept that courts do not get involved in church disciplinary matters. She then appealed. The unanimous judgment of the federal court of appeals was based on broader grounds of First Amendment (of the U.S. Constitution) rights: "Because the practice of shunning is a part of the faith of the Jehovah's Witness, we find that the 'free exercise' provision of the United States Constitution . . . precludes [her] from prevailing. The defendants have a constitutionally protected privilege to engage in the practice of shunning. Accordingly, we affirm" the earlier judgment of the district court.

18 The court opinion continued: "Shunning is a practice engaged in by Jehovah's Witnesses pursuant to their interpretation of canonical text, and we are not free to reinterpret that text . . . The defendants are entitled to the free exercise of their religious beliefs . . . Courts generally do not scrutinize closely the relationship among members (or former members) of a church. Churches are afforded great latitude when they impose discipline on members or former members. We agree with [former U.S. Supreme Court] Justice Jackson's view that '[r]eligious activities which concern only members of the faith are and ought to be free-as nearly absolutely free as anything can be.' . . . The members of the Church [she] decided to abandon have concluded that they no longer want to associate with her. We hold that they are free to make that choice."

19 The court of appeals acknowledged that even if the woman felt distress because former acquaintances chose not to converse with her, "permitting her to recover for intangible or emotional injuries would unconstitutionally restrict the Jehovah's Witnesses free exercise of religion . . . The constitutional guarantee of the free exercise of religion requires that society tolerate the type of harms suffered by [her] as a price well worth paying to safeguard the right of religious difference that all citizens enjoy." This decision has, in a sense, received even more weight since it was handed down. How so? The woman later petitioned the highest court in the land to hear the case and possibly overturn the decision against her. But in November 1987, the United States Supreme Court refused to do so.

20 Hence, this important case determined that a disfellowshipped or disassociated person cannot recover damages from Jehovah's Witnesses in a court of law for being shunned. Since the congregation was responding to the perfect directions that all of us can read in God's Word and applying it, the person is feeling a loss brought on by his or her own actions.

Discipline-Many Benefit

21 Some outsiders, upon hearing about disfellowshipping, are inclined to sympathize with a wrongdoer who can no longer converse with members of the Christian congregation. But is not such sympathy misplaced? Consider the potential benefit that the wrongdoer and others may receive.

22 For example, on page 26 we noted Lynette's comment about her choice 'to cut herself off completely from all association' with her disfellowshipped sister Margaret. She and her Christian relatives 'believed that Jehovah's way is best.' And it is!

23 Lynette's sister later told her: 'If you had viewed the disfellowshipping lightly, I know that I would not have taken steps toward reinstatement as soon as I did. Being totally cut off from loved ones and from close contact with the congregation created a strong desire to repent. I realized just how wrong my course was and how serious it was to turn my back on Jehovah.'

24 In another case, Laurie's parents were disfellowshipped. Yet she says: 'My association with them never stopped but increased. As time went on, I became more and more inactive. I got to the point of not even attending meetings.' Then she read material in The Watchtower of September 1 and 15, 1981, that stressed the counsel of 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 and 2 John 9-11. "It was as if a light bulb were turned on in me," she writes. 'I knew I would have to make some changes. I now better understand the meaning of Matthew 10:34-36. My decision was not an easy one for my family to swallow, for my son, five, is the only boy, and they love him dearly.' It is hoped that losing such association will touch the parents' hearts, as it did Margaret's. Still, the discipline involved helped Laurie: 'I am back out in the field ministry. My marriage and family are stronger because of my change, and so am I.'

25 Or consider the feelings of one who was disfellowshipped and later reinstated. Sandi wrote: 'I would like to thank you for the very helpful and instructive articles [mentioned above] on reproof and disfellowshipping. I am happy that Jehovah loves his people enough to see that his organization is kept clean. What may seem harsh to outsiders is both necessary and really a loving thing to do. I am grateful that our heavenly Father is a loving and forgiving God.'

26 So our God who requires that an unrepentant wrongdoer be expelled from the congregation also lovingly shows that a sinner can be reinstated in the congregation if he repents and turns around. (A disassociated person can similarly request to become part of the congregation again.) Thereafter he can be comforted by Christians who will confirm their love for him. (2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:8-13) Truly, it is just as Paul wrote: "No discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but grievous; yet afterward to those who have been trained

by it it yields peaceable fruit, na mel y, righteousness."-Hebrews 12:11.

Preparing For Child Custody Cases Booklet (published by the Watchtower Society):

Many try to portray the beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses as dogmatic and restrictive. When answering questions about your religious beliefs and practices, emphasize the fact that you have formed your beliefs and adopted your practices after much study and reflection your religion is not simply a matter of rules which have been imposed by the elders. You want to emphasize the fact that you are a thinking, well-balanced, and reasonable individual who is competent to act as a parent. Avoid any response which gives the impression that you are unwilling or unable to provide for your child's best interests because of your religious beliefs.

Pay Attention To Yourselves and To All the Flock (Confidential Elders-Only Rule Book) (Published in 1991), Page 103:

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)

The Watchtower, April 15, 1991 Issue:

Former friends and relatives might hope that a disfellowshipped one would return; yet out of respect for the command at 1 Corinthians 5:11, they do not associate with an expelled person.

The Watchtower, October 1, 1993 Issue, Page 19:

Apostasy is, in reality, a rebellion against Jehovah. Some apostates profess to know and serve God, but they reject teachings or requirements set out in his Word. Others claim to believe the Bible, but they reject Jehovah's organization and actively try to hinder its work. When they deliberately choose such badness after knowing what is right, when the bad becomes so ingrained that it is an inseparable part of their makeup, then a Christian must hate (in the Biblical sense of the word) those who have inseparably attached themselves to the badness.

The Watchtower, July 15, 1995 Issue:

Why is it loving to expel an unrepentant wrongdoer from the congregation? Doing so is an expression of love for Jehovah and his ways. (Psalm 97:10) This action shows love for those pursuing a righteous course because it removes from their midst one who could exercise a bad influence on them. It also protects the purity of the congregation.

The Watchtower, March 1, 1998 Issue:

...we must not only "be obedient" but also "be submissive" to those taking the lead. The Greek word for "be submissive" literally means "be you yielding under." Commenting on the expressions "be obedient" and "be submissive," Bible scholar R. C. H. Lenski says: "One obeys when one agrees with what he is told to do, is persuaded of its correctness and profitableness; one yields . . . when he has a contrary opinion." When we understand and agree with the direction of those taking the lead, obedience may come readily. But what if we do not understand the reason behind a particular decision?

Here is where we may need to be submissive, or yielding. Why? For one thing, we need to trust that these spiritually qualified men have our best interests at heart. After all, they well know that they must render an account to Jehovah for the sheep committed to their care. (James 3:1) In addition, we do well to remember that we may not know all the confidential facts that led them to an informed decision.--Proverbs 18:13.

What about being submissive when it comes to judicial decisions? Granted, this may not be easy, especially if a decision is made to disfellowship someone we love—a relative or a close friend. Here again, it is best to yield to the judgment of the "gifts in men." They are in a position to be more objective than we can be, and they may know more of the facts.

...[the elders] must also keep the congregation clean, and the Bible directs that they disfellowship unrepentant wrongdoers. (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) In many cases the wrongdoer himself accepts the decision. The discipline may be just what he needs to come to his senses. If we, his loved ones, are submissive when it comes to the decision, we may thereby be helping him to benefit from the discipline.

The Watchtower, December 1, 1998 Issue, Page 17:

What About Slandering Publicity?

At times, Jehovah's Witnesses have been the target of distorted information in the media. For example, on August 1, 1997, a Russian newspaper published a slanderous article claiming, among other things, that Witnesses categorically require members to 'reject their wives, husbands, and parents if these do not understand and do not share their faith.' Anyone who is truly acquainted with Jehovah's Witnesses knows that the charge is false. The Bible indicates that Christians are to treat unbelieving family members with love and respect, and Witnesses endeavor to follow that direction. (1 Corinthians 7:12-16; 1 Peter 3:1-4) Even so, the article was printed, and many readers were thus misinformed. How can we defend our faith when we are falsely accused?

Official Jehovah's Witnesses Media Relations Web Site, March 18, 2002 [<http://www.jw-media.org/beliefs/beliefsfaq.htm>]:

Do you shun former members?

Those who simply cease to be involved in the faith are not shunned. In compliance with the Scriptures, however, members can be expelled for serious unchristian conduct, such as stealing, drunkenness, or adultery, if they do not repent and cease such actions. Disfellowshipping does not sever family ties. Disfellowshipped members may continue to attend religious services, and if they wish, they may receive pastoral visits. They are always welcome to return to the faith.-1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

Official Jehovah's Witnesses Media Relations Web Site, July 20, 2002 [<http://www.jw-media.org/beliefs/beliefsfaq.htm>]:

Do you shun former members?

Those who simply leave the faith are not shunned. If, however, someone unrepentantly practices serious sins, such as drunkenness, stealing, or adultery, he will be disfellowshipped and such an individual is avoided by former fellow-worshippers. Every effort is made to help wrongdoers. But if they are unrepentant, the congregation needs to be protected from their influence. The Bible clearly directs: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." (1 Corinthians 5:13) What of a man who is disfellowshipped but whose wife and children are still Jehovah's Witnesses? The spiritual ties he had with his family changes, but blood ties remain. The marriage relationship and normal family affections and dealings can continue. As for disfellowshipped relatives not living in the same household, Jehovah's Witnesses apply the Bible's counsel: "Quit mixing with them." (1 Corinthians 5:11) Disfellowshipped individuals may continue to attend religious services and, if they wish, they may receive spiritual counsel from the elders with a view to their being restored. They are always welcome to return to the faith if they reject the improper course of conduct for which they were disfellowshipped.

Official Jehovah's Witnesses Media Relations Web Site, June 2003 [<http://www.jw-media.org/beliefs/beliefsfaq.htm>]:

Do you shun former members?

Those who become inactive in the congregation, perhaps even drifting away from association with fellow believers, are not shunned. In fact, special effort is made to reach out to them and rekindle their spiritual interest. If, however, someone unrepentantly practices serious sins, such as drunkenness, stealing or adultery, he will be disfellowshipped and such an individual is avoided by former fellow-worshippers. Every effort is made to help wrongdoers. But if they are unrepentant, the congregation needs to be protected from their influence. The Bible clearly states: 'Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.' (1 Corinthians 5:13) Those who formally say they do not want to be part of the organization any more are also avoided. What of a man who is disfellowshipped but whose wife and children are still Jehovah's Witnesses? The spiritual ties he had with his family change, but blood ties remain. The marriage relationship and normal family affections and dealings can continue. As for disfellowshipped relatives not living in the same household, Jehovah's Witnesses apply the Bible's counsel: "Quit mixing with them." (1 Corinthians 5:11) Disfellowshipped individuals may continue to attend religious services and, if they wish, they may receive spiritual counsel from the elders with a view to their being restored. They are always welcome to return to the faith if they reject the improper course of conduct for which they were disfellowshipped.

Our Kingdom Ministry, August 2002 Issue:

The bond between family members can be very strong. This brings a test upon a Christian when a marriage mate, a child, a parent, or another close relative is disfellowshipped or has disassociated himself from the congregation.

How to Treat Expelled Ones: God's Word commands Christians not to keep company or fellowship with a person who has been expelled from the congregation

Jesus was... instructing his followers not to associate with expelled ones.

This means that loyal Christians do not have spiritual fellowship with anyone who has been expelled from the congregation. But more is involved. God's Word states that we should 'not even eat with such a man.' (1 Cor.

5:11) Hence, we also avoid social fellowship with an expelled person. This would rule out joining him in a picnic, party, or trip to the shops or theatre or sitting down to a meal with him either in the home or at a restaurant.

What about speaking with a disfellowshipped person?

A simple 'Hello' to someone can be the first step that develops into a conversation and maybe even a friendship. Would we want to take that first step with a disfellowshipped person?

The fact is that when a Christian gives himself over to sin and has to be disfellowshipped, he forfeits much: his approved standing with God;....sweet fellowship with the brothers, including much of the association he had with Christian relatives.

Former spiritual ties have been completely severed. This is true even with respect to his relatives, including those within his immediate family circle....That will mean changes in the spiritual fellowship that may have existed in the home. For example, if the husband is disfellowshipped, his wife and children will not be comfortable with him conducting a family Bible study or leading in Bible reading and prayer.

The situation is different if the disfellowshipped or disassociated one is a relative living outside the immediate family circle and home

It might be possible to have almost no contact at all with the relative.

Loyal Christians should strive to avoid needless association with such a relative, even keeping business dealings to an absolute minimum.

Sometimes Christian parents have accepted back into their home for a time a disfellowshipped child who has become physically or emotionally ill. But in each case the parents can weigh the individual circumstances.

Will he bring 'heaven' into the home?

Cooperating with the Scriptural arrangement to disfellowship and shun unrepentant wrongdoers is beneficial.

After hearing a talk at a [Jehovah's Witnesses] circuit assembly, a brother and his fleshly sister realized that they needed to make adjustments in the way they treated their mother, who lived elsewhere and who had been disfellowshipped for six years. Immediately after the assembly, the man called his mother, and after assuring her of their love, he explained that they could no longer talk to her unless there were important family matters requiring contact. Shortly thereafter, his mother began attending meetings and was eventually reinstated. Also, her unbelieving husband began studying and in time was baptized [as a Jehovah's Witness].

The Watchtower, July 15, 1985 Issue, Pages 30-31:

Questions From Readers

· Did 2 John 10, which says not to receive into one's home or to greet certain ones, refer only to those who had promoted false doctrine?

In context this counsel concerned the "many deceivers" who had gone forth, "persons not confessing Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh." (2 John 7) The apostle John offered directions on how Christians back there should treat one who denied that Jesus had existed or that he was the Christ and Ransomer. John directed: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him. For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works." (2 John 10, 11) But the Bible elsewhere shows that this had a wider application.

At one time among the Christians in Corinth, a man was practicing immorality, and the apostle Paul wrote them to "quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man." (1 Corinthians 5:11) Now, did that apply to former brothers who had been expelled only for the gross wrongs there listed?

No. Revelation 21:8 shows also that such individuals as unrepentant murderers, spiritists, and liars are included among those who merit the second death. Surely the counsel in 1 Corinthians 5:11 would also have been applied with equal force to former Christians guilty of these wrongs. Further, John wrote that some "went out from us, but they were not of our sort; for if they had been of our sort, they would have remained with us. But they went out that it might be shown up that not all are of our sort." (1 John 2:18, 19) John did not say that they had been expelled for gross sin. Perhaps some of them just quit, deciding that they no longer wanted to be in the congregation because they disagreed over a doctrine. Others may have grown tired and given out.-1 Corinthians 15:12 ; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; Hebrews 12:3, 5.

Of course, if a brother had begun to stray into sin, mature Christians would have tried to help him. (Galatians 6:1; 1 John 5:16) If he had doubts, they would have attempted to 'snatch him out of the fire.' (Jude 23) Even if he had become inactive, not going to meetings or in the public ministry, spiritually strong ones would have striven to restore him. He might have told them that he did not want to be bothered with being in the congregation, reflecting his weakened faith and low spirituality. They would not have badgered him, but they might occasionally have made a friendly visit on him. Such loving, patient, merciful efforts would have reflected God's interest that none be lost.-Luke 15:4-7.

In contrast, John's words indicate that some went further than spiritual weakness and inactivity; they actually repudiated God's congregation. Someone may have come out openly in opposition to God's people, declaring that he no longer wanted to be in the congregation. He may even have renounced his former faith formally,

such as by a letter. Of course, the congregation would have accepted his decision to disassociate himself. But how would they then have treated him?

John says: "Everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God. He that does remain in this teaching is the one that has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him." (2 John 9, 10) Those words certainly would have applied to a person who became an apostate by joining a false religion or by spreading false doctrine. (2 Timothy 2:17-19) But what about those who John said "went out from us"? While Christians in the first century would know that they should not associate with an expelled wrongdoer or with an active apostate, did they act similarly toward someone who was not expelled but who willfully renounced the Christian way?

Aid to Bible Understanding shows that the word "apostasy" comes from a Greek word that literally means "'a standing away from' but has the sense of 'desertion, abandonment or rebellion.'" The Aid book adds: "Among the varied causes of apostasy set forth in apostolic warnings were: lack of faith (Heb. 3:12), lack of endurance in the face of persecution (Heb. 10:32-39), abandonment of right moral standards (2 Pet. 2:15-22), the heeding of the 'counterfeit words' of false teachers and 'misleading inspired utterances' (. . . 1 Tim. 4:1-3) . . . Such ones willfully abandoning the Christian congregation thereby become part of the 'antichrist.' (1 John 2:18, 19)"

A person who had willfully and formally disassociated himself from the congregation would have matched that description. By deliberately repudiating God's congregation and by renouncing the Christian way, he would have made himself an apostate. A loyal Christian would not have wanted to fellowship with an apostate. Even if they had been friends, when someone repudiated the congregation, apostatizing, he rejected the basis for closeness to the brothers. John made it clear that he himself would not have in his home someone who 'did not have God' and who was "not of our sort."

Scripturally, a person who repudiated God's congregation became more reprehensible than those in the world. Why? Well, Paul showed that Christians in the Roman world daily contacted fornicators, extortioners, and idolaters. Yet he said that Christians must "quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother" who resumed ungodly ways. (1 Corinthians 5:9-11) Similarly, Peter stated that one who had "escaped from the defilements of the world" but then reverted to his former life was like a sow returning to the mire. (2 Peter 2:20-22) Hence, John was providing harmonious counsel in directing that Christians were not to 'receive into their homes' one who willfully 'went out from among them.'-2 John 10.

John added: "For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works." (2 John 11) Here John used the Greek word of greeting *khai'ro* rather than the word *a-spa'zo-mai*, found in verse 13.

Khai'ro meant to rejoice. (Luke 10:20; Philippians 3:1; 4:4) It was also used as a greeting, spoken or written. (Matthew 28:9; Acts 15:23 ; 23:26) *A-spa'zo-mai* meant "to enfold in the arms, thus to greet, to welcome." (Luke 11:43; Acts 20:1, 37; 21:7, 19) Either could be a salutation, but *a-spa'zo-mai* may have implied more than a polite "hello" or "good-day." Jesus told the 70 disciples not to *a-spa'se-sthe* anyone. He thus showed that their urgent work allowed no time for the Eastern way of greeting with kisses, embraces, and long conversation. (Luke 10:4) Peter and Paul urged: 'Greet [*a-spa'sa-sthe*] one another with a kiss of love, or a holy kiss.'-1 Peter 5:14; 2 Corinthians 13:12, 13; 1 Thessalonians 5:26.

So John may deliberately have used *khai'ro* in 2 John 10, 11 rather than *a-spa'zo-mai* (verse 13). If so, John was not urging Christians then to avoid merely warmly greeting (with an embrace, kiss, and conversation) a person who taught falsehood or who renounced the congregation (apostatized). Rather, John was saying that they ought not even greet such an individual with *khai'ro*, a common "good-day."

The seriousness of this counsel is evident from John's words: "He that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works." No true Christian would have wanted God to view him as sharing in wicked works by associating with an expelled wrongdoer or with one who rejected His congregation. How much finer to be a sharer in the loving Christian brotherhood, as John wrote: "That which we have seen and heard we are reporting also to you, that you too may be having a sharing with us. Furthermore, this sharing of ours is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."-1 John 1:3.