

## Disfellowshipping

Members of the Watchtower are terrified of being disfellowshipped. Not only are removed members ostracized from fellow believers, but also from their immediate family. Because of this, I felt it necessary to consult the supreme authority (God's word) on this issue. The Watchtower practice of disfellowshipping will now be analyzed through the eyes of scripture.

First and foremost, allow me to share the biblical reason why Christ visited our planet: *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him."* Matthew 3:17:

*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 30, paragraph 3, says:

"Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

If this ever must be done, the whole church will then know that the erring person is no longer considered a member of the church, and that person would not be allowed to take Communion, since partaking in the Lord's Supper is a sign of partaking in the unity of the church ... *'Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.'* 1 Cor. 10:17"

The Lord's Supper (Communion) is for the entire body of Christ. However, those who have been removed from the body (disfellowshipped) are no longer part of the body. The Watchtower, however, fails to understand the true concept regarding the body of Christ, but that discussion will have to wait until a later time.

There are many passages of scripture incorrectly applied by the Watchtower. One example is found in 2 John, where we are instructed to avoid certain persons. It reads:

*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives a greeting participates in his evil deeds.* 2 John 10-11

The Watchtower uses this scripture to imply that God instructs Jehovah's Witnesses to avoid greeting or receiving disfellowshipped family members into their homes, is not what God is communicating through the Apostle John.

These verses, in context, contradict Watchtower ("WT") interpretation. Verse 7 reveals the context: *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist."*

False teachers were traveling from congregation to congregation denying that the Son of God was incarnate (God in the flesh). This was the Gnostic heresy, and John cautioned his friends not to extend even normal hospitality to such people. To do so would imply endorsement, and could be construed as the encouragement of false doctrine.

In context, the Apostle John warns us to stay clear (not even greeting or inviting them into our homes) of those who deny and who teach that Christ was not God in the flesh. *“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* John 1:14. Ironically, this text and passage is actually warning the body of Christ to steer clear from Watchtower teachers, because they deny that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. John calls them *“the deceiver and the antichrist.”*

Disfellowshipping, excommunicating, and shunning have long been practiced over the centuries by various religious organizations. In fact, not only is shunning practiced, but some religious groups actually impose financial hardship.

These practices beg the question: What is God’s view on the matter? What does His word communicate on this issue? Are Watchtower methods (shunning the individual, threats of sanctioning family members, etc.) approved by God? What does the Bible teach? As this topic is developed, I will also quote portions of the 2010 Elders Manual (143 pages of Watchtower controlling procedures). What does their Manual reveal on this subject?

The WT is like any other cult organization in that they demand strict compliance to **their theology ... their rules ... and their guidelines**. Of course living in the United States gives us all certain freedoms. Cults are allowed to practice as they wish and members are allowed to worship as they will. Organizations (cults too) have rights, but so do their members. Slavery was abolished over 400 years ago. In other words, we are free.

The major problem with the WT organization is that they are not guided by the “Jehovah” of the Bible. Consequently, they lack the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Further, because they refuse to come to Christ as their Lord and Savior, they walk in spiritual darkness. Consequently, they are controlled and guided by a power not of God, but of His adversary, Satan the devil.

Religious organizations are free (under the law) to impose restrictions upon their members. Any cult, religious organization, or business, as long as no law is broken, may set its own rules and use various methods/tools to insure obedience. One of the most effective methods used by the WT is that of fear.

During World War II a man named Adolf Hitler knew very well how powerful this tool was, and in fact, he was able to control an entire country because of its effectiveness. Yes, the fear of death kept people silent. The Watchtower, too, uses this tool. Obey or pay.

Yes, the fear of not obeying will result in another kind of death ... the loss of contact with family members (some never see or speak to their family again). The fear of being disfellowshipped is a very strong motivating tool. Fear was used by Hitler to control his country, and fear is used by the Watchtower to control millions of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

## **2010 Elders Manual**

“Judicial Hearing Procedure” Chapter 7 (at page 91) states: “The judicial committee should look for clear works of repentance commensurate with his wrongdoing.”

*For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what at earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. 2 Cor. 7:10, 11*

This section of the Elder’s Manual continues by stating:

“In order to extend mercy, the committee must be **convinced** that the wrongdoer has a changed heart condition and that he has a zeal to right the wrong and is absolutely determined to avoid it in the future. Even if this is the individual’s first time before a judicial committee, it is necessary to determine whether his actions and attitude indicate that he has repented and can thus remain in the congregation.”

The Elders Manual consists of 143 pages of rules, procedures, instructions, etc., on how to control members of the WT. As one elder said to me many years ago, “One day you’ll receive the power! You will learn how to disfellowship, how to reinstate, how to control, and everything in between ... yes, once you become an elder, you will have the power!” Just for your information, the Elders Manual is nothing more than a *how-to-book*, although, as indicated above, they misinterpret scripture (like 2 John 10-11).

If you look at Matthew 18, verses 15 through 18, Jesus Christ (God the Son) tells us exactly how the disfellowshipping process (steps 1-3) should be followed:

*And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Matthew 18:15-18*

Jesus Christ outlines how Christians are to handle sins committed against one another ... any sin. There are 3 steps to follow.

### **FIRST STEP:**

**Go** ... the Greek word means: **to go stealthily, quietly, secretly** ... privacy is critical, between you and him or her. Jesus commands us to act, but to act in stealth mode. The sin is between you and him or her. Like Michael Jackson said, “it’s nobody’s business.” Jesus told us not to expose our Christian brother’s shortcoming before others.

**Reprove ...** the Greek verb here “admonish” (or reprove) occurs for the first time in the New Testament. The purpose and goal is to gain our brother; while the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. “*And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.*” John 16:8. If our efforts are successful, all is good. This issue will end, and peace will follow. Essentially, the person sinned against goes to the person (in stealth mode, secret) to gain the erring Christian back. If he or she listens, step two would not be necessary. The whole matter would end right there. Yes, between the two persons, only!

## **SECOND STEP**

*Only if Step One Was Not Successful*

If Step One was not successful, Jesus Christ tells us to move on to Step Two, as described in Matthew 18, verse 16:

*“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”*

Since gossip is strictly forbidden in Scripture because of its destructiveness as can be seen by Proverbs 20:10: “*He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do no associate with a gossip*”... the assumption is that the one or two persons that are “taken” have witnessed the offense firsthand. The appeal to “two or three” was well grounded in the Law of Moses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6, 7; 19:15).

“Every Word, Fact” includes the prior offense and the words associated with it as well as words spoken at the confrontation itself – all in preparation for a *possible reporting* to the church. Thus, the establishment of fact is “in the mouth” (not just in the mind) of the witnesses; that is, they are to prepare to give testimony if necessary.

The purpose of Steps One and Two is the gaining of our brother or sister. Interestingly, in Step One, Jesus Christ instructs us to proceed in stealth mode. He wants the entire problem (sin) dealt with secretly. No one is to know. No one! Jesus Christ not only explained the exact procedure to follow (stealth mode), but said something else. Did you catch it? He told us who not to tell. The sin was not to be confessed to men. In other words, He told us not to confess the sin to elders, or pastors, or deacons, or ministerial servants, or any other human being. Why? I will develop this point further on. Step one and step two was to limit the exposure.

## **THIRD STEP**

*Only if Steps One & Two Were Not Successful*

If Step Two was not successful, Jesus Christ tells us to move on to Step Three:

*“And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”* Matthew 18:17

If a sinning believer has refused to hear both the offended and witnesses, the proper step would be to take it to church leadership. The offended party alone should make the presentation to the church. They would then investigate and bring it before the entire church if excommunication

were appropriate. So, the last stop is the local church, which has the power to “bind” sins (Matthew 16:19; 18:18).

### **Disfellowshipped**

*Treat Them As A Gentile & Tax Collector*

The reference in Matthew 18, verse 17, to Gentile and Tax gatherer or collector is very Jewish. Gentiles were considered heathen beyond the covenant God had made with Abraham and his seed. Despite the fact that Abraham himself was a Gentile and God extended His salvation to Gentile individuals like Melchizedek and Job, strict Jews believed Gentiles had no chance, let alone the certainty, of salvation.

If Gentiles represented the heathen without, tax collectors represented the hypocrites within – betrayers. Tax collectors were considered Hebrew traitors that collaborated with the enemy (Rome) to extract wealth from God’s people.

Jesus’ judgment was strong. A person who refused to repent before the church was to be treated as an outsider to the covenant of God as the Jews considered Gentiles, or as an inside traitor as the Jews considered a tax collectors. We must remember that Jesus dealt with Jewish mentality here. Jews would not mix or eat with them.

The church collectively disassociates from the responsibility of this brother’s behavior, yet with the hope that the punishment will lead him to repentance.

In verse 18, God promises that He will support the local body decisions of His elect: *“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

The only two known occurrences of this in early church history say as much and are recorded by the apostle Paul.

*“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has is father’s wife. And you have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”* 1 Cor. 5:1-5

Greek Scholar Dr. Spiros Zodhiates in his *Exegetical Matthew Commentary* comments on Paul’s words:

“Paul makes the interesting contrast between pride and the mourning that puts away the unrepentant believer.

Too often the church allows the rebellious brother to remain intact, priding itself on its broadmindedness rather than mourning its loss of purity. But the church should mourn, especially since the purpose of delivery to Satan is the salvation of the spirit after Satan, apparently self-defeatingly, destroys the flesh. On the same positive note, most commentators take 2 Corinthians 2: 5-11 as indicating that this particular fornicator did repent. The “destruction of the flesh” does not necessarily mean physical death. It could also mean the destruction of the principle of the self life or the flesh in the person.”

*“Keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.” 1 Tim. 1:19-20*

Dr. Spiros Zodhiates continues his comments on 1 Timothy 1:19-20:

“Parenthetically, Paul’s individual binding, ‘I delivered unto Satan’ (Hymenaeus and Alexander), reflecting his apostolic authority, is not the norm. Jesus’ teaching is normative for His body. The church collectively excommunicates only on unrepentance before two or three witness.”

In his *Institutes of The Christian Religion* (4.12.10), John Calvin wrote:

“[Excommunication] rebukes and animadverts upon his manners; and although it ... punishes, it is to bring him to salvation, by forewarning him of his future doom. If it succeeds, reconciliation and restoration to communion are ready to be given... Hence, though ecclesiastical discipline does not allow us to be on familiar and intimate terms with excommunicated persons, still we ought to strive by all possible means to bring them to a better mind, and recover them to the fellowship and unity of the Church: as the apostle also says, "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3: 15). If this humanity be not observed in private as well as public, the danger is, that our discipline shall degenerate into destruction.”

### ***Confess Your Sins To God Not Man***

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

The New Testament teaches that there are to be elders (1 Timothy 3), deacons (1 Timothy 3), bishops (Titus 1:6-9), and pastors (Ephesians 4:11) – but not priests.

In the Old Covenant, the faithful had to approach God through the priests. The priests were mediators between the people and God. The priests offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. That is no longer necessary. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we can now approach God’s throne with boldness (Hebrews 4:16). The temple veil tearing in two at Jesus’ death was symbolic of the dividing wall between God and humanity being destroyed. We can approach God directly, ourselves, without the use of a human mediator. Why? Because Jesus Christ is our

great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-15; 10:21), and the only mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5).

### **How To Never Fear Judicial Hearings**

Chapter 5 of the Elders Manual, under the heading “Determining Whether a Judicial Committee Should Be Formed,” paragraph 1 (at page 58) states:

“Elders should **act promptly** when they receive a report of serious wrongdoing so as to safeguard the congregation and provide assistance to the wrongdoer.”

Under the sub-heading “Evidence Establishing Wrongdoing” (at page 71), it reads:

“Even though a Christian has been accused of wrongdoing serious enough to require judicial action, **a judicial committee should not be formed unless the wrongdoing has been established**. What kind of evidence is acceptable?”

- **Confession** (admission of wrongdoing, either written or oral, may be accepted as conclusive proof without other corroborating evidence)
- **There must be two or three eyewitnesses**, not just people repeating hearsay, no action can be taken if there is only one witness

Avoiding the whip of Watchtower wrath is quite easy. Follow Matthew 18. Christ did not want the church involved unless absolutely necessary, hence, the reason for proceeding in stealth mode.

God is the only One who can forgive us our sins. We confess to Him! Our sins are not church business, unless Steps One and Two of Matthew 18 are ignored.

Smith's Bible Dictionary quote regarding “Excommunication”:

Excommunication is the formal removal of an individual from church membership and the informal separation from that individual. [Matthew 18:15-20](#) gives the procedure and authority for a church to do this. It instructs us that one individual (usually the offended party) is to go to the offending individual. If he/she does not repent, then two or three go to confirm the situation and the refusal to repent. If there is still no repentance, it is taken before the church. This process is never “desirable,” just as a father never delights in having to discipline his children. Often, though, it is necessary. The purpose is not to be mean-spirited or to display a “holier than thou” attitude. Rather, the goal is the restoration of the individual to full fellowship with both God and other believers. It is to be done in love toward the individual, in obedience and honor to God, and in godly fear for the sake of others in the church.

The Bible gives an example of the necessity of excommunication in a local church—the church at the city of Corinth ([1 Corinthians 5:1-13](#)). In this passage, the apostle Paul also gives some purposes behind the biblical use of excommunication. One reason (not directly found in the passage) is for the sake of the testimony of Christ Jesus (and His church) before unbelievers.

When David sinned with Bathsheba, one of the consequences of his sin was that the name of the one true God was blasphemed by God's enemies ([2 Samuel 12:14](#)). A second reason is that sin is like a cancer; if allowed to exist, it spreads to those nearby in the same way that “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” ([1 Corinthians 5:6-7](#)). Also, Paul explains that Jesus saved us so that we might be set apart from sin, that we might be “unleavened” or free from that which causes spiritual decay ([1 Corinthians 5:7-8](#)). Christ's desire for His bride, the church, is that she might be pure and undefiled ([Ephesians 5:25-27](#)).

Excommunication is also for the long-term welfare of the one being disciplined by the church. Paul, in [1 Corinthians 5:5](#), states that excommunication is a way of delivering the unrepentant sinner “over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” This means that excommunication can somehow involve God’s using Satan (or one of his demons) as a disciplinary tool to work in the sinner's life physically to bring about true repentance in his/her heart.

Hopefully the disciplinary action of the church is successful in bringing about godly sorrow and true repentance. When this occurs, the individual can be restored to fellowship. **The man involved in the 1 Corinthians 5 passage repented**, and Paul encouraged the church to restore him to fellowship with the church ([2 Corinthians 2:5-8](#)). Unfortunately, disciplinary action, even when done in love and in the correct manner, is not always successful in bringing about such restoration. But even when church discipline fails to achieve its goal of bringing repentance, it is still needed to accomplish the other good purposes mentioned above.

We have all likely witnessed the behavior of a young boy who has been allowed to do as he pleases with no consistent discipline. It is not a pretty sight. Nor is such parenting loving, for it dooms the child to a dismal future. Such behavior will keep the child from forming meaningful relationships and performing well in any kind of setting. Similarly, discipline in the church, while never enjoyable or easy, is not only necessary, but loving as well. Moreover, it is commanded by God.

*Fausset's Bible Dictionary* quote regarding “Excommunication”:

As the church is a society constituted for maintaining certain doctrines and corresponding morals, it plainly has the right to exclude from communion such as flagrantly violate its doctrinal and moral code. The Jews had three forms of excommunication, alluded to in Luke 6:22 by our Lord, "blessed are ye when men shall separate you from their company (the Jewish niddui, for 30 days), and shall reproach you (the second form, cherem, for 90 days (See ANATHEMA), Judges 5:23), and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake" (the third form, shammatha, perpetual cutting off): John 9:34-35 margin; compare Exodus 30:33; Exodus 30:38; also John 12:42; John 16:2.

Christian excommunication is commanded by Christ (Matthew 18:15-18); so 1 Timothy 1:20; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Titus 3:10; "delivering unto Satan" means casting out of the church, Christ's kingdom of light, into the world that lieth in the wicked one, the kingdom of Satan and darkness (Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 6:12; Acts 26:18; 1 John 5:19). The apostles besides, under divine inspiration, inflicted bodily sicknesses and death on some (e.g. Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira;

Acts 13:10, Elymas). For other cases of virtual, if not formal, exclusion from communion, though in a brotherly not proud spirit, see 2 Thessalonians 3:14; Romans 16:17; Galatians 5:12; 1 Timothy 6:3; 2 John 1:10; 3 John 1:10; Revelation 2:20; Galatians 1:8-9.

Paul's practice proves that excommunication is a spiritual penalty, the temporal penalty inflicted by the apostles in exceptional cases being evidently of extraordinary and divine appointment and no model to us; it consisted in exclusion from the church; the object was the good of the offender (1 Corinthians 5:5) and the safeguard of the sound members (2 Timothy 2:17); its subjects were those guilty of heresy and great immorality (1 Timothy 1:20); it was inflicted by the church (Matthew 18:18) and its representative ministers (Titus 3:10; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 5:3-4). Paul's infallible authority when inspired is no warrant for uninspired ministers claiming the same right to direct the church to excommunicate as they will (2 Corinthians 2:7-9). Penitence is the condition of restoration. Temporary affliction often leads to permanent salvation (Psalm 83:16); Satan's temporary triumph is overruled "to destroy the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 22:31).