

reprint of the Mar/Apr 1986 *Bethel Ministries Newsletter*

Disfellowshipping and Shunning Your Family

by **Randall Watters**

Jesus gave us a loving pattern to follow in regards to talking to our brother or sister and confronting them with either (1) problems in our relationships, or (2) with regards to unconfessed sin on their part. In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus outlines three steps to take in talking to your brother, in attempting to settle difficulties or to right the wrong. If the three steps prove unfruitful, he says, "Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer." Math. 18:17b

In Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians, he had heard of a fellow Christian who was cohabiting with his stepmother, and he wrote the Corinthians and told them not to associate "with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not to even eat with such a one..." (1 Cor. 5:11) Similar counsel was given regarding unruly ones in the church, who would not respond to initial counseling (2 Thes. 3:14,15). But in the case of the Corinthians, both the church and the individual failed to respond, and so Paul wrote them and said, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."

The purpose of disfellowshipping is (1) to cause the repentance of the errant Christian; (2) to remove a stumbling stone from the church, so that others would not be infected (1 Cor. 5:6,7); (3) to instill the others with fear of God's judgment for pursuing a wrong course, and (4) to keep the church free from a marred reputation with the world (Rom. 2:23,24). If the errant brother was to seek forgiveness and display heartfelt repentance for his actions and attitude, he was to be forgiven and accepted back into the church. Thus he would not be overly abused by Satan, whose authority he had temporarily come under by being cast out into the world (2 Cor. 2:10,11).

The tendency for unloving elders to abuse their authority is usually checked by the church having little authority over the lives of its members. But if the church or religious organization becomes an ecclesiastical system which demands absolute subjection to its authority, the Scriptures become a powerful tool to browbeat and coerce the individual into submission, out of fear of losing something very valuable to him. Elders are therefore counseled to walk in humility (1 Peter 5:16) and to become examples to the body (1 Tim. 4:12). They are to have tender affection for others (Rom. 12:10). Yet at the same time, they are to be ready to pray for the sick (James 5:14,15), correct those stepping out of line (Gal. 6:1), stop gossip and misleading talk (1 Tim. 1:37; Titus 1:9), and to warn the flock against false doctrine and false teachers or ideas that may be present in the body (Rom. 16:17,18; Titus 3:10,11. If necessary in order to protect the flock, the offender is to be marked as bad association (2 Thess. 3:14,15) or disfellowshipped (1 Cor. 5:11-13).

Considering 2 John 9, 10:

In this passage, the elder John minces no words in warning against teachers who went too far beyond the gospel, in promoting new teachings which denied the real meaning of the gospel. By the end of the first century, there were already many such teachers, notably the Gnostics and Docetists. To protect the church from false teaching, the apostle makes the acceptance of visiting Christians conditional on their confession that "Christ is come in the flesh" (2 John 7). The Greek verb used is in a present continuous sense, as contrasted with 1 John 4:2 and 1 John 5:6, where Christ is spoken of as *having come* in the flesh (past tense perspective). Howard Marshall, in *The Epistles of John*, states:

It seems unlikely . . . that the false teachers simply denied the reality of the incarnation. The use of the present and perfect tenses becomes significant if the point is that Jesus Christ had come *and still existed* "in flesh." We know that some Gnostic thinkers taught that a heavenly power (the Christ) came upon Jesus at his baptism in the form of the Spirit, but that it departed from him again after the crucifixion, so that there was no lasting union of the divine Christ with the human Jesus, and hence no real, lasting incarnation. The elder's formulation of the orthodox faith in Jesus Christ seems to be designed to exclude such interpretations of the person of Jesus. For him it was axiomatic that there had been a true incarnation, that the Word had become flesh and remained flesh. (p. 70, 71)

If this interpretation is true, then those who deny that Christ *presently* has a glorified body of flesh would be classed among the antichrists, and not only certain unorthodox groups in the first century.

Jehovah's Witnesses And Disfellowshipping

Jehovah's Witnesses practice disfellowshipping, not only for unrepentant sinners, but also for a number of other reasons. Since 1973, for instance, a member who smokes is subject to disfellowshipping. So would be those who work directly in defense departments or the military, or who are employed by any kind of religious organization. Walking into a church could merit this penalty, as could taking a blood transfusion, saluting the flag (or any act of patriotism), celebrating holidays, talking to a disfellowshipped person (including relatives), disagreeing with ANY doctrinal points, and the list of punishable offenses grows greater each year.

It was not always so legalistic in the Watchtower. Like many religious movements, grace abounds in the beginning; but as they get more structured, rules and regulations take the place of grace and mercy. Note this early statement by the Watchtower:

We would not refuse to treat one as a brother because he did not believe the Society is the Lord's channel. If others see it in a different way, that is their privilege. There should be full liberty of conscience. WT April 1, 1920, p. 100, 101.

It didn't take long, however, for the "persecuted" to become the persecutors. By 1930, those who disagreed with President Rutherford were classed as "evil slaves" and were classed with the "man of perdition," to be destroyed. (WT 1930, p. 275-281)

In 1952, a distinct disfellowshipping policy was laid out. Witnesses were not to even say a greeting to disfellowshipped ones. The March 1, 1952 *Watchtower* said, "Those who are acquainted with the situation in the congregation should never say 'Hello' or 'Goodbye' to him. He is not welcome in our midst, we avoid him." (p. 141)

By 1955, associating with a disfellowshipped person was grounds for disfellowshipping for a JW. (WT 1955, p. 607.)

In January of 1972 it was declared that homosexuality and bestiality by one's marriage partner were not considered as *porneia* (fornication), and were therefore not grounds for divorce (Matt. 5:32). If one divorced under such conditions, he would lay himself open to adultery and could be disfellowshipped. (WT Jan. 1, 1972, p. 32.) Yet, by December of the very same year, they had reversed their stand, saying that ALL types of illicit sexual intercourse are grounds for divorce, including the above-mentioned acts. (WT December 15, 1972, p. 767, 768.)

By 1974, the Governing Body entered the bedrooms of their subjects. Standards of conduct were laid out for married couples in bed. Oral or anal sex, or anything classified as a "perversion" or "unnatural practices" in the sex act would subject them to disfellowshipping. (WT November 15, 1974, p. 704. See also WT of 1974 pages 160, 484-486.)

Oddly enough, in April of '74 they had seemingly relaxed the tension towards disfellowshipped persons. In the April 1974 WT, for instance, on page 467, they said:

Congregation elders, as well as individual members of a congregation, therefore, ought to guard against developing an attitude approaching that which some Jewish Rabbinical writers fomented towards Gentiles in viewing them as virtual enemies.

The gist of the article was that disfellowshipped ones were not to be treated with unnecessary cruelty; especially members of one's family or those in obvious hardship situations. They stated that 'we don't want to be like Pharisees' who walked on the other side of the road when a Gentile was in trouble. (WT Aug. 1, 1974, p. 467.)

With the Feb. 15th issue of 1978, the bedroom rules were now not to be enforced by elders, and publishers were not to be intimidated or spied on any more; although the previously banned practices were still considered unclean. (p. 32)

A reversal of this trend of grace was in store for the '80's, however. With the unrest in the organization over the 1975

debacle, and now the headquarters shakeup in 1980, a hard line was taken in 1981 against any disfellowshipped or disassociated person.

The Light Gets Blighter

With the failure of 1975 to bring the end of the world, as well as the headquarters shakeup in 1980, a hard line was taken in 1981 against any disfellowshipped or disassociated person. Even if they were members of one's own family, they were now to be shunned except in the most necessary functions of life. (WT Sept. 15, 1981, p. 26-31 under "If a Relative is Disfellowshipped.") The Watchtower plainly says that Witnesses shouldn't even say 'hello' to a person who has left the organization. On page 25 of this magazine they say:

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?

In spite of the ban, however, some Witnesses were speaking out in discontent or disagreement with the Watchtower. An even greater number were subject to "witch hunts" where suspected dissenters were asked a series of questions to determine if they still believed the Society was "God's channel of communication." Many of those questioned were automatically disfellowshipped, often without a fair trial and in secret meetings. Yet, the word got out through the grapevine that all was not well with the Watchtower's doctrine. A special problem began to develop within families where one dissenter might speak to several others, and yet remain concealed from the eyes of the elders.

In order to choke the grapevine, the Watchtower of January 1, 1983 (p. 30,31) contained a "Questions From Readers" article on "How can we assist those in our congregation who have a disfellowshipped relative?"

In the first part of the article, they attack the "heart condition" of such a person, denying any possibility that they may have left the organization for a valid reason. Here is a sample quote:

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."

However, the Watchtower reluctantly acknowledged that people are human (an ever-present hindrance to their techniques). They continued:

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.

As the article continues, those who left the organization (including relatives) were put down for interfering with the rest of the family's "happiness." Using an illustration involving three generations of a family: (1) children, (2) parents who have been disfellowshipped, and (3) the grandparents (who are typical JW's), they comment:

Of course, the grandparents have to determine if some necessary family matters require limited contact with the(ir) 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!

However, the reader must see some vestige of human consideration in the midst of this relentless tirade. So the following sentence, humorous in its irony, is injected:

We just need to go out of our way to be warm, genuinely interested and, above all, spiritual.

The attack continues with the example of a couple, one of which is disfellowshipped: ". . . the expelled mate has proved that he is not the sort of person that we want to be around...So maybe a visit can be made when the disfellowshipped one is known to be out of the house.

So, in other words, the Watchtower has, indeed, gone so far as to develop the attitude of the Jewish Rabbinical writers in Jesus' day and have no doubt surpassed them on occasion. Not only are Witnesses currently not to speak to anyone who may leave the organization, but they are to avoid them like the plague. Those who have seen this attitude in practice could add that JW's usually avoid even making *eye contact* with such persons, and might even move out of the neighborhood. This has happened in some cases. It is all part of the attitude that they must "punish" those that leave, and this punishment is almost always of a psychological nature.

Due to an increase in lawsuits directed against the Watchtower over disfellowshipping since the late '70's, the Society officially stopped disfellowshipping people who voluntarily want out of the organization as of July 1, 1984. Though provision had previously been made for this in the book, *Organization For Kingdom Preaching* published in 1972, virtually all were disfellowshipped who disassociated from the Watchtower, regardless of the reason. Though this practice has continued in some cases since the July 1st article, others are now allowed to be considered as "disassociated," though the treatment is the same as if they were disfellowshipped.

However, evil motives or wicked sins are automatically attributed to those who wish to disassociate. Notice the way the Watchtower expresses their thoughts regarding these ones:

Or, as mentioned in John 6:66, occasionally a Witness on his own initiative will decide to leave the way of truth. He may even make known his decision after the committee begins to look into his wrongdoing. . . . Then it will no longer be necessary for the elders to continue their investigation. (WT 7/1/84, p. 31)

The implication is that he is a "wrongdoer" either because he is leaving, or more likely, because he is involved in some kind of sin.

The December 15, 1984 WT added this barb in an effort to prevent Witnesses from learning too much:

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. (p. 19)

It became obvious that too many were still questioning the Watchtower, reading literature that exposed their past, or were talking to disfellowshipped relatives. So in the July 15, 1985 WT, the Governing Body applied the injunction in 2 John 10 (against antichrists) to those that disassociate themselves. No mention at all is made of the context of this passage (verse 7 tells us that these ones deny Christ as come in the flesh). Nevertheless, the penalty meant for true apostate teachers is now applied to ANYONE disassociating himself. The article is not specific as to whether this total shunning is to be carried out with relatives living in one's own home or not. Quoting from their *AID* book in reference to "apostates," they say,

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. (p. 31)

The Witnesses are then counseled not to even say a simple greeting to such ones, and to avoid having them in their houses at all. In the case of a married mate being an "apostate," there might be concessions made, though this is not indicated here.

Still, some Witnesses continued to entertain doubts and talk about these in private. In November of 1985, the Watchtower warned its readers of "sharing in the sins of others." How might they do this? By failing to tell the elders of a fellow brother or sister who is a "wrongdoer." Since being a "wrongdoer" includes disagreeing with the Watchtower, members are encouraged to tattle on friends and relatives who hold to any variation from Watchtower doctrine. If they don't, then they share in the "apostate's" sin. (WT Nov. 15, 1985, p. 19,20)

The Governing Body is taking the stand that those who reject any of the teachings of the 'mother' organization are

'apostasizing' from the true Christian faith. The March 15, 1986 issue of *The Watchtower* even provides the reader with visual aids, as it shows a picture of a JW demonstrating how to throw 'apostate' literature away as soon as it hits the mailbox. They say,

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. (p. 12)

Therefore, resolve in your heart that you will never even touch the poison that apostates want you to sip. (p. 20)

The Governing Body is cultivating in the minds of their followers an abject fear of any dissenters. They thereby hope to cause the Witnesses to run at the sight of anything that seriously challenges their authority. In the April 1, 1986 issue of *The Watchtower*, an effort is made to support their disfellowshipping of those who disagree in the slightest with Watchtower teaching. They accuse the clergy of having no authority because they are not able to agree on all matters of doctrine. Then they take Galatians 1:8,9 out of context in order to "prove" that the churches are teaching a different gospel than the apostle Paul, which is not true. They quote 1 Cor. 1:10 as an attempt to "prove" that the early church was not divided, but the context of the verse proves the opposite, since the Corinthians DID have a problem with divisions. Paul never actually says they settled the differences, either. Furthermore, the church was full of divisions over minor issues according to the Revelation of John (chapter 13). A key statement is then made:

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? (p. 31)

They then list the beliefs necessary:

- 1) Their view on the issue of God's sovereignty.
- 2) Jesus was a preexistent creature prior to his birth.
- 3) The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses are the sole interpreters of the Bible.
- 4) Christ returned in 1914 and set up his kingdom in heaven.
- 5) 144,000 will go to heaven.
- 6) Armageddon is near, followed by the Paradise earth, where the rest of the Witnesses will live.

The Governing Body is thusly confusing the issue, by painting a false picture of the New Testament church. The church was divided on many things, according to the New Testament. On the major doctrinal issues they agreed, though, such as the message of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3,4), the incarnation of Christ (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7), and that he is the promised Messiah in the Jewish context (1 John 2:22,23). Later heresies would demand further clarifications of orthodoxy, such as the Deity of Christ, the means of salvation, etc. The orthodox churches today are in agreement on these issues. Furthermore, the Witnesses admit that, since 1918, they have been teaching a "new gospel not taught in centuries past," namely, the invisible return of Christ and setting up the kingdom in 1914 (WT 5/1/81, p.17). Therefore, they, not the churches, fall under the condemnation of Gal. 1:8,9 of preaching a different gospel, and a different Jesus (2 Cor. 11:4).

As time goes on, we can expect the Watchtower to become even more paranoid regarding the questioning of their authority or doctrine. This is largely for two reasons: (1) there is an ever-increasing amount of information available that exposes their scholastic dishonesty, and (2) there is an ever-increasing number of dissenters who will not remain silent. Their only recourse (assuming they want to maintain their present absolute authority over their members) is to

fortify the "Watchtower Curtain" against people defecting towards freedom. Please pray with us that this curtain will be lifted.

reprinted from the Bethel Ministries Newsletter of Jan/Feb 1987

SIMON SAYS . . .

Shun Your Own Family

by Joe and Helen Ortega and Randy Watters

"Simon says" is a game normally played by children; a kind of *follow the leader*. Sometimes, however, it is played by adults, with serious consequences. This article is about such consequences, as observed among Jehovah's Witnesses.

It was not too long ago that this Newsletter ran two articles on disfellowshipping, so I apologize for any redundancy. Perhaps after reading the letters written to us in this issue, you will understand why there is a need for another article. There are some days I cannot hold back the tears when I read these letters and see the pain and suffering that so many are experiencing upon leaving the Watchtower.

As we know, the Jehovah's Witness families of such ones are encouraged to treat them worse than a stranger. The outcast is to be shunned without an acknowledgment of their existence and the treatment is to be devoid of human courtesy and compassion. To those not familiar with the Watchtower organization, such treatment is shocking. Indeed, it is a far cry from the description Jesus gave on how to recognize his disciples. He said we would know them by their love (1 John 13:35).

The following is an example of the treatment given to a man who resigned from the Watchtower Society when he realized they were not "the truth." His wife divorced him when he left the WT. She is still a Witness. He had a severe automobile accident and spent weeks in the hospital from extensive head injuries. He writes:

My ex-wife never once let the children call to see how I was or even send me a card. Not one Jehovah's Witness ever came by or wrote a note to see how I was. However, I was blessed to have some good Christian friends call me and come by the hospital.

Another letter is from a lady who was never a Jehovah's Witness. Her daughter became a Witness. The lady's "crime" was being a Christian and attending a Christian church. She writes these heartbreaking words: "She has stopped coming to see me and she will not bring my grandchildren either. Please tell me what I can do?"

Still another letter states: "After I was disfellowshipped, my entire family would have nothing to do with me. I cannot see my daughter or her children. It has been 5 years."

A man in Florida writes: "I have four daughters and I haven't seen them in three years. They are Jehovah's Witnesses." A young woman from Chicago wrote recently:

It is hard for my children to understand why they cannot go to their grandmother's funeral. She died a Jehovah's Witness and the entire family are Witnesses. They were asked not to come because I was disfellowshipped. They really don't understand.

Why does this so-called Bible-believing organization have such unscriptural and heartless rules that break up family ties? Let's reexamine their explanations from various *Watchtower* magazines. As far back as 1963 they said,

[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. (WT 7/1/63, p.411)

While disfellowshipping for unrepentant gross sins is biblically proper (1 Cor. 5:13), the WT cuts off *anyone who disagrees in the slightest with Watchtower policy or teaching*; one of the many reasons they are recognized as a cult. (For a full treatment of the Scriptural reasons for disfellowshipping, see the March/June issues of this Newsletter.) To be disfellowshipped by the elders of the Watchtower (even over minor doctrinal issues) *means being totally shunned by God as well*:

It is a great tragedy for one to be disfellowshipped. For this means a cutting off from Jehovah and his favor. The disfellowshipping action taken by the congregation is *merely the confirmation of what has already taken place in the heavens. These visible agents of God [the elders] merely acknowledge what Jehovah has already done in heaven.* (emphasis added)

A disfellowshipped person is cut off from the congregation, and the congregation has nothing to do with him. Those in the congregation will not extend the hand of fellowship to this one, nor will they so much as say "Hello" or "Good-bye" to him. (ibid., p.411,412)

[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. (ibid., p.413; emphasis added)

What about blood ties? The July 15, 1963 *Watchtower* (p. 443) goes into this question in detail. They consider the family who does not live under the same roof as well as the family who lives together. They insist if he does not live under the same roof, the only contact with him would be when *absolutely necessary*. Let's look at their words. Under the title, "Family Responsibility in Keeping Jehovah's Worship Pure" they refer to the relative not living in the home:

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. (WT 7/15/63, p.443,444)

The Watchtower follows up with how to treat the disfellowshipped mate who is living under the same roof:

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. (ibid., p.446)

But wait! "New light" from Jehovah? Ten years later it seemed that God changed his attitude and rules regarding the cutoff ones and decided to show love and mercy to them. Note the August 1, 1974 *Watchtower* (p. 467) under the heading, "Maintaining a Balanced View Toward the Disfellowshipped One":

Congregation elders, as well as individual members of a congregation, therefore, ought to guard against developing an attitude approaching that which some Jewish Rabbinical writers fomented towards Gentiles in viewing them as virtual enemies. It is right to hate the wrong committed by the disfellowshipped one, but it is not right to hate the person nor is it right to treat such ones in an inhumane way. (WT 8/1/74, p.467)

. . . not "mixing in company" with a person, or treating such one as "a man of the nations," does not prevent us from being decent, courteous, considerate and humane. (ibid., p.468)

Yet, even during this time of liberality, shunning (in the form of holding back one's affection) was practiced:

. . . How, then, can parents carry out the injunction to discipline their children in harmony with God's Word

when one of their children is disfellowshipped? They can still use God's Word or other publications that discuss the Bible in training the son or daughter, but they use these in a corrective manner, not as though having a spiritual 'good time' with such a one *in the way they could with the other children*. How this is handled is for the parents to decide. This does not call for unkindness, but *they do not accord such disfellowshipped son or daughter the same approved spiritual relationship granted the others*. (ibid., p.470; emphasis added)

One can only imagine how this "special treatment" affected such unfortunate children.

Simon says . . . "Take a harder line."

Reading the statements about being "courteous and humane" sounds as if God changed his mind and felt pity and compassion for the erring ones. Sadly, this was not the case. Jehovah, according to the Watchtower Society, went back to the "old light" as "new light." Once again the unloving, unfeeling hatred for those cutoff ones was brought back. The Jan. 1, 1983 *Watchtower* accused any who may be disfellowshipped (for whatever reason) of having a "truly bad heart" or pursuing a course of wickedness:

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." (p.30)

The Watchtower did reluctantly acknowledge that people are human. They continued:

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. (ibid., p.31)

The attack continues with the example of a couple, one of which is disfellowshipped. When other Witnesses come to visit the couple, they must exercise caution, for

. . . the expelled mate has proved that he is not the sort of person that we want to be around. . . So maybe a visit can be made when the disfellowshipped one is known to be out of the house. (ibid., p.31)

While Jehovah's Witnesses would have you believe that those who are disfellowshipped are gross sinners who were rightfully disfellowshipped according to the Bible (1 Cor. 5:13; 2 John 9-11), the truth of the matter is, many of those disfellowshipped simply disagreed with some particular teaching of the organization. Raymond Franz, former member of the Watchtower's Governing Body in New York, writes:

I know many persons who clearly evidence [a] concern [for truth], yet who are labeled as "apostates," "antichrists," "instruments of Satan." In case after case after case, the sole basis for such condemnation is that they could not honestly agree with all the organization's teaching or policies. (*Crisis of Conscience*, Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1983, p. 32)

Franz describes disfellowshipping thusly:

What must it mean to a mother, who has seen a baby daughter come forth from her own body, has nursed that baby, cared for it through illness, has trained the young girl through the formative years of life, living her problems with her, feeling her disappointments and sadnesses as if they were her own, shedding tears along with her tears-what must it mean to that mother to have her daughter, now an adult, suddenly reject her and do so simply because her mother sought to be true to her conscience and to God?

What must it do to a father or mother to see a son or daughter marry and be told, for the same reason, that 'it would be best if they did not appear at the wedding,' or know that a daughter has given birth to a child and be told that they should not come to see their grandchild?

This is not imagination. Exactly those things are happening to many parents who have been associated with Jehovah's Witnesses. (ibid., p.33)

Witnesses are currently instructed not to speak to anyone who may leave the organization, and are to avoid them like the plague. Those who have seen this attitude in practice could add that JWs usually avoid even making *eye contact* with such persons, and might even move out of the neighborhood. This has happened in some cases. It is all part of the attitude that they must "punish" those that leave, and this punishment is almost always of a psychological nature.

Evil motives or wicked sins are automatically attributed to those who wish to disassociate. Notice the way the Watchtower automatically implies they are "wrongdoers":

Or, as mentioned in John 6:66, occasionally a Witness on his own initiative will decide to leave the way of truth. He may even make known his decision *after the committee begins to look into his wrongdoing*. . . . Then it will no longer be necessary for the elders to continue their investigation. (WT 7/1/84, p. 31; emphasis added)

The implication is that he is a "wrongdoer"; either because he is leaving, or more likely, because he is involved in some kind of sin.

Simon Says . . . "Close Your Eyes"

The December 15, 1984 WT added this barb in an effort to prevent Witnesses from learning too much:

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. (p. 19)

It became obvious that too many were still questioning the Watchtower, reading literature that exposed their past, or were talking to disfellowshipped relatives. So in the July 15, 1985 WT, the Governing Body applied the injunction in 2 John 10 (against antichrists) to those that disassociate themselves. No mention at all is made of the context of this passage (verse 7 tells us that these ones deny Christ as come in the flesh). Nevertheless, the penalty meant for true apostate teachers is now applied to ANYONE disassociating himself. The article is not specific as to whether this total shunning is to be carried out with relatives living in one's own home or not. Quoting from their *AID* book in reference to "apostates," they say,

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.(p. 31)

What Will "Simon" Say Next?

With many court cases now in progress in various parts of the United States and Canada, it is hard to say exactly what will happen in the next couple of years. Most likely, the WT will continue to enforce a hard line against any communication with disfellowshipped friends or relatives. The reason is simple: The Witness will be asked to examine the history and cover-ups of the Watchtower organization, so as to reconsider their allegiance to the New York-based organization. Since an objective examination of the Watchtower organization virtually *always* leads to the Witness leaving, the Governing Body wants to prevent this at all costs. To lose their followers is to lose their power. If "Simon said" then, *who* would jump?

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