

the baptism of such 'other sheep' was as much a symbol of their dedication to Jehovah God through Christ as that of the anointed remnant had been." -*The Watchtower*, Dec. 15, 1982, Page. 19 Italics added.

The gravity of the above declaration cannot be exaggerated as to its violence against historical Christianity. They are saying that from the spring of 1935 the way into the congregation of Jesus Christ is barred to those believing in Jesus Christ! Now, according to the Watchtower prophet, a different hope replaces the one we read about in the Bible. And what is the basis for this new hope? Nothing more substantial than that the Society declared it so. Such a declaration represents a supreme example of sectarian presumptuousness that effectively renders the Christian hope invalid. In another Watchtower the same occasion is described as follows: "It was as if the 'faithful and discreet slave' class had used a 'key of knowledge' (Matt. 24:45-47; Luke 11 :52) and had unlocked the door for prospective members of the 'great multitude' to enter into wonderful privileges." - *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1979, page 28

It is easy for men to make strong assertions and color these assertions in exaggerated phrase. We ought not be influenced by the weight they place on their own

declarations. There is no end to this kind of rhetoric coming from various sectarian movements. But what were the *spiritual credentials* of the man and the organization he served as its official spokesman that we should set aside a two thousand-year Christian hope? The man was Joseph F. Rutherford, second president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. This is the man who preached that Charles T. Russell was the "faithful servant" of Matt. 24:45. This is the man who preached that Christ became invisibly present in 1874. Here was a man who predicted that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the rest of the Hebrew prophets would all be resurrected in 1925. He authorized the writing and publication of *The Finished Mystery* in 1917 that predicted the end of Christendom in 1918 and the violent end of all worldly governments in 1920. All of these things and much, much more were presented as "advancing light upon the Holy Scriptures," by this man and the organization he represented. Now, in the spring of 1935, we are told that another "truth" had been revealed-one that terminated the historical gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ and the significance of baptism. The facts are clear to those who wish to accept them. The Society has many times proven itself unworthy of being relied upon for spiritual guidance. (Deut. 18: 20-22) □

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## **Disfellowshipping Policies and Practices**

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The disfellowshipping policies and practices of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society have resulted in untold misery for many thousands of people and their families. It is not a question of whether a religious community has the right or obligation to expel gross wrongdoers, or not, but whether it is appropriate or beneficial to invoke this measure beyond Scriptural guidelines to include a host of offenses to rid itself of critics or to apply the same stringent measures against those who wish to voluntarily withdraw from a certain religious organization.

A growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses are being disfellowshipped over matters of conscience-not wrongdoing. Still others are withdrawing or disassociating themselves for the same reason, namely, matters of conscience. Since the publishing of *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1981, the Watchtower ,Society has had in place a policy that lumps all of these together with practitioners of gross immorality. That there are reasons for not associating with certain ones is made clear from what the apostle

Paul wrote to the congregation in Corinth: "In the letter that I wrote you I told you not to associate with immoral people. Now I did not mean pagans who are immoral or greedy or are thieves, or who worship idols. To avoid them you would have to get out of the world completely. What I meant was that you should not associate with a person who calls himself a brother but is immoral or greedy or worships idols or is a slanderer or a drunkard or a thief. Don't even sit down to eat with such a person." -1 Corinthians 5:9-11, *Good News Bible*.

Before writing the above, Paul had specifically cited a case of gross immorality in the Corinthian congregation involving an incestuous relationship between a man and his father's wife. (1 Cor. 5:1,2) Confident that his information was accurate, the apostle upbraided the brothers for not acting to correct matters and he counseled them accordingly: "When you are assembled together in the name of the Lord Jesus, and I am spiritually present with you, then with the power of our Lord Jesus he is to be handed over to

Satan so that his sensual body may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." -1 Cor. 5:4,5 *Jerusalem Bible*

It can be appreciated that a scandalous situation existed and Paul was distressed, not only that it was true, but that the congregation did not seem to appreciate its seriousness. He wanted them to act, not only to rid themselves of this man, but to exonerate themselves as a community of believers. He addressed himself "to the church of God that is in Corinth, to all who are called to be God's holy people." (Cor. 1 :2, *GNB*) It appears then, that this was to be a congregational action taken "when you are assembled together," and not just by a select few to merely represent the congregation. This seems to be borne out by what the apostle had to say in his subsequent letter, wherein he commended the congregation for acting on his counsel and urging them to now welcome back into fellowship the brother who had apparently repented of his wrong course: "The punishment already imposed by the majority of the man in question is enough; and the best thing now is to give him your forgiveness and encouragement, or he might break down from so much misery. So I am asking you to give some definite proof of your love for him." -2 Corinthians 2:6-8, *Jerusalem Bible*.

We note that the punishment was "imposed by the majority," apparently meaning the majority of the congregation. Whether some were not present when action was taken or did not agree with the majority we cannot know for a certainty, but the point is that it was apparently an open meeting with all who chose to be there present. The language does not suggest that only three or four elders met in secret and then later merely informed the congregation of its' decision to which they were free only to conform.

This open congregational way of handling such matters was, at one time, the manner in which Jehovah's Witnesses dealt with such things. But during the administration of Nathan H. Knorr, third president of the Watchtower Society, all that was changed. In *The Watchtower* of 1944 there was a discussion of Jesus' words regarding the proper procedure to follow in the event that one's brother sinned against him. In applying the Lord's counsel to finally take the matter to the church, it said the following:

"In times past those words of the Lord have been interpreted to this effect: That, where one member of

the church sins against another, the matter is, after due process, to be brought before a whole congregation. There it should be discussed and argued about. Then a vote should be taken by stretching forth the hand of each member of the congregation in a democratic voting manner. Thus the congregation must indicate its determination of what should be done with the one found guilty. Putting such a meaning into our Lord's words, however, has served to cause more controversy and disruption among congregations in times past than almost any other thing. Undue heat of contrary opinions has been stirred up and undue measure of time and attention has been taken from the Lord's work of preaching the good news of the Kingdom. Reasonably, that could not be what the Lord purposed by giving such instructions. When methods produce the wrong results, then it is wise and timely to examine the methods hitherto used to determine whether such are Scriptural or not." -*The Watchtower*, May 15, 1944 pages 151,152

The main thrust of the argument for a change in the practice seems to be that it wasted people's time, caused disagreements and that decisions were rendered in a "democratic-voting manner." The same article then goes into a lengthy discussion of how things ought to be conducted in a "theocratic manner": "The matter for straightening out should not be aired before the whole congregation for judgment, and take up everybody's time and consideration. It should be quietly laid before the representative members of the congregation or company, the ones that are charged with the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the brethren and for the direction of their service to the Lord. The case recorded at Deuteronomy 21:18-21 illustrates this way of proceeding in an orderly, Theocratic manner." -*Ibid.* page 152

The case to which they refer at Deuteronomy 21 is that of a rebellious son whom his parents can no longer control. He was to be brought before the elders of the city for discipline. About this procedure *The Watchtower* had this to say: "According to this procedure, the hearing of the case and the rendering of the decision should be confined to the representative brethren, as pictured by the city elders, not elective elders as in religious organizations, but elders who are such, due to Christian knowledge, growth and experience. Their decision must be according to Theocratic law. After they render the decision, the congregation may hear about the matter and may concur in the decision and in the action due." -*Ibid.*

page 152

The above represents the manner in which judicial matters have been conducted among Jehovah's Witnesses up to the present time. Incidentally, the reference to "religious organizations" is put this way because at that time the "truth" was that Jehovah's Witnesses were *not a religion!* The term "Theocratic" is the Anglicized form of a compound Greek word meaning God (*Theos*) ruled (*Kratos*). This is in counter-distinction to "democratic" meaning people (*Demos*) rule (*Kratos*). What "theocratic" rule has meant for Jehovah's Witnesses since the days of Rutherford is rule from the world headquarters of the Watchtower Society through its' official representatives. The case that they cite from Deuteronomy 21 in the 1944 *Watchtower* does not invalidate the previous method of handling things. For one thing, the system under the Law is not binding upon Christians. And even if it were, the procedure does not fit the notion that such meetings ought to be "quietly" handled away from the eyes and ears of the congregation. The Bible account says that the man was to be brought "to the older men of his city and to the gate of his place." (Deut. 21: 19, *NW*) According to the Watchtower publication *Aid to Bible Understanding* the gate of the city was the most public place in the city:

"At the city gates the older men of the city sat in judgment. (Deut. 16:18; 21:18-20; 22:15; 25:7) Even the kings, at times, held audiences or sat in judgment there. (2 Sam. 19:8; 1 Ki. 22: 10; Jer. 38:7) There, important announcements and official proclamations were made. (2 Chron. 32:6-8) It was in the public square before the Water Gate that Ezra read the Law. (Neh. 8: 1-3) Because the judges, the prominent men of the city, merchants and businessmen and a goodly number of people were usually at the gate, prophets often went there to make their proclamations. Their messages delivered there would spread much faster. (1 Ki. 22:10; Jer. 17: 19) Wisdom is pictured as crying out at the entrances of the gates for all in the city to become aware of its counsel. (Prov. 1:20,21; 8:1-3) Inasmuch as the gate was a news center, the good or bad works of the city's inhabitants would become known there. (Prov. 31:31)" -*Aid to Bible Understanding*, page 624

When the city older men sat in judgment, it appears that it was in the most public of places-the gate of the city-and not hidden away in some secret location away from all others. Open court is a

recognized mark of a lawful society and can have a redeeming effect on all rightly disposed ones. This openness is missing in church hearings conducted by elders of Jehovah's Witnesses. They are secretive meetings before as few as three men who sit and make judgments, binding upon Witnesses everywhere in the most profound matters effecting

the lives of those before them. They exercise the power of life or death-organizationally speaking.

Despite the seriousness of these hearings no one, as a rule, is permitted to observe unless they are giving testimony and then, after their statement is given, they are asked to leave. If a decision for disfellowshipping by these men is appealed, the appeal committee is briefed by the original committee before talking with the person adversely judged. Reports sent to the world headquarters are confidential and not shared with the person condemned, even though these reports may contain distortions of facts and do not contain a dissenting opinion, should there be one. (only two out of three elders need agree on a judgment) The accused is not allowed an impartial advocate. He may not use a recorder to document the hearing or hearings, nor will he be provided minutes of the hearing by any official sitting as his judge. Under these circumstances, individuals are put through the most difficult of experiences. Some require medical treatment following these hearings. It has been reported that some require hospitalization. It may even result in suicide. Such proceedings may be called "theocratic," but ruling a religious organization from the top down does not necessarily make it God-ruled. It may just be one man dominating another. (Eccl. 8:9)

Regarding the objection raised in the 1944 *Watchtower* about such matters taking up everybody's time-time that could be better spent preaching. What could be more important than the spiritual welfare of our brothers and the congregation as a whole? In the Lord's illustration of the Fine Shepherd, he made it clear that there are times when the interests of only one sheep can outweigh the needs of 99 others. (Matt. 18: 12-14) Many Christians come into crisis at one time or another in their lives. All Christians are capable of committing serious sin under a given set of circumstances. This does not necessarily prove they are wicked. It may simply demonstrate that they are weak in a certain area of their character their humanity. When this happens the love and concern of the congregation is put to the test. All too often, the

elders of Jehovah's Witnesses focus on the need to keep the organization clean than they do on the brother in crisis. All too often the brother is viewed as wicked and not merely vulnerable and recoverable. A brother who appears angry and hostile towards the committee may be judged as unrepentant, when in reality he or she may merely be tilled with self-hatred for sins committed. The elders bring no expertise, no clinical training to these proceedings as they receive no such training. Time should not be a factor in such matters. The community of believers is a family of brothers and that which seriously affects one ought to be felt by all and is worthy of the attention by all.

Another objection raised by *The Watchtower* was that people end up expressing their decision in "democratic-voting" by stretching forth the hand. But how else can humans convey to other humans how they feel about a matter unless they verbalize it with a "yes" or a "no" or merely raise their hand? Does this method make it "non-theocratic?" The lowliest of Christians, organizationally speaking, can have the spirit of God in making a decision or judgment and the most exalted Christian, organizationally speaking, can be lacking in God's spirit in a matter. It is not who votes in such matters but rather what they bring to that vote that determines whether it is "theocratic" or not. A congregation may be divided on a matter and when that happens the majority view may prevail. But, is it any different in bodies of elders? Do they always agree on a decision? No, they do not. If two elders are for disfellowshipping and one elder is against, the majority of two is considered sufficient for disfellowshipping. According to the book *Crisis of Conscience* written by former governing body member Raymond Franz, even the worldwide governing body can be divided in opinion on issues affecting the lives of millions of Jehovah's Witnesses. Presenting a "united front" on the part of a local committee of elders or the worldwide governing body may give the appearance of unity, but that unity may be more political than theocratic. In such setting, the interests of one individual and even the individual himself may become expendable and the concept of organization becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end.

Whether judicial decisions would be appreciably altered by congregational participation we cannot know for a certainty. Given the present day mind-set of Jehovah's Witnesses, probably not. What such open hearings would facilitate, however, would be the eliminating of hearsay information, gossip and slander

that often attends such action. It would provide family, friends and congregational brothers considerably more opportunity to know the facts and provide a better basis for making an individual judgment than merely "going along" because one does not question the elders.

Another disturbing aspect of the disfellowshipping process among Jehovah's Witnesses is that grounds for such action have been expanded to include a variety of offenses not treated in the Bible itself. Such action in the early church appears to have been limited to gross practices of immorality and extreme heresies. (1 Cor. 5: 11; 6:9,10; 2 John 7-11) For example, in the same letter the apostle Paul condemned the man who was intimate with his father's wife, he also speaks of those in the congregation who were denying the resurrection hope. (1 Cor. 15: 12) While the apostle refuted this denial and forcefully demonstrated how serious an error it was, there is nothing to suggest that such persons were to be disfellowshipped. Yet, today, among Jehovah's Witnesses one could be disfellowshipped for using tobacco, belonging to certain organizations like the Y.M.C.A., voting or becoming attached to the military-to name but a few. Cornelius, the first Gentile Christian, would not be acceptable to the Watchtower Society for baptism because he was an army officer. (Acts 10) Did God make a mistake in pouring out his holy spirit on this soldier? Has the Watchtower Society become more righteous than Christ in deciding who can. and who cannot be baptized?

Attempts to keep an organization "clean" has its limitations. It must be remembered that true and false Christians were to grow together in the same field. (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-42) When men, even well-motivated men, take themselves too seriously in this matter and become over-zealous to police everyone's actions and thoughts, they invariably end up doing more harm than good. It must be remembered that no one is "clean" in himself. We can only be "clean" by receiving forgiveness for our sins through faith in Jesus Christ. (John 13: 10; 1 John I :7) Even if we avoid serious sin we are not clean within ourselves-it is a gift from God through Jesus Christ! Furthermore, we cannot read people as could the Lord. (John 2:25) We can only go by the outward appearance and this can be deceptive in making judgments. (John 7:24; Matt. 22: 16) Even those who appear to be excelling as 'organizational' Christians may not be motivated by love and zeal, but rather ambition and pride.

A growing number of Witnesses cannot, in good conscience, simply parrot everything the Society teaches. If such ones voice doubts or objections, they become subjects for disfellowshipping, as there is no freedom of speech in the organization. The only avenue open to them, apart from being tried as an "apostate," is to withdraw themselves and disassociate from the organization. This decision is most often forced upon them by the intransigent policies of the Society and the climate of suspicion and fear manifested in the attitudes of local bodies of elders. A few may find a way to drop out of sight and avoid either of the two objectionable choices the Society offers. Such persons are not immoral people seeking the freedom to practice God-dishonoring things. They are not denying faith in God and Christ nor rejecting the authority of the Bible and its standards. They simply can no longer hold to certain attitudes and teachings they consider speculative, unscriptural and not theocratic .

If they take this step, and many do at great personal costs, often losing family and friends, they face total ostracism. Since *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, was published, all disfellowshipped or disassociated ones are treated alike. Sadly, the policy of the Society destroys the family unit. They say that family ties remain in force despite disfellowshipping, but consider the following counsel presented in the above mentioned *Watchtower*: "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!" -*The Watchtower*, Sept. 15, 1981, page 28

You will note that "disfellowshipped" and "disassociated" are both placed in the same category in the above. They go on to say that there should no longer be any "spiritual fellowship" with such a one. - page 28, par. 11. They then present a host of Talmud-like, hair-splitting rules: "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." -*Ibid*, page 28, par. 13

The same paragraph says that the minor child can accompany them to meetings at the Kingdom Hall. No mention is made regarding the child's emotional needs. It presents a rigid, unloving, puritanical approach to "discipline." It is in this climate that one is supposed to be aided to spiritual health. To illustrate how they completely ruin the family circle consider the following: "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 non-relative 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 or associate with him, in view of Paul's directions at 1 Corinthians 5: 11. "" *Ibid*, page 30, par. 23

After saying "there is no point in looking for some rule," they proceed to set out rules that govern virtually every aspect of life and interaction with others, including family members. In the paragraph above, they enlist support for their position by citing 1 Corinthians 5:11 and apply this counsel against many who are not guilty of the kinds of sins Paul addresses himself to here. It is just another example of what happens to the Christian community when it is governed by the sectarian spirit.