

. Witnesses. They fear to read anything critical of the Society because it is not just the Society that is at risk. Their whole foundation of faith is at risk! Few, find the moral courage to run that risk.

There is no end to the Society's ingenuity to make the Apocalypse fit their organizational perspective. A further example of this can be found in their interpretation of the "two myriads of myriads" of cavalry (200,000,000) mentioned at Rev.9:16. This huge number, they say, represents the "John class" (page 150) How are they able to fit the minuscule number into such a large prophetic and symbolic number? While acknowledging that the number of the "John class" is now fewer than 10,000 (the latest Memorial report showed that 8,685 identified themselves of this class) they have no difficulty in adding to this number to fulfill the symbolism. They simply add the several million members of the "great crowd" to the smaller number. The book puts it this way:

"To become myriads even in a symbolic sense, would they not need reinforcements? That is what they have needed, and by Jehovah's undeserved kindness, that is what they have received! From where have these come?" There follows this question a brief history of how the Society created this class of believers from 1935 onward. They argue that this growing class of believers share in the cavalry charge symbolically described. About this they say: "The great crowd has continued to declare its unqualified unity with the John class in pouring out the plagues on Christendom. In

1988 this great crowd made up more than 99.7 percent of the work force that Jehovah is using in the field." - *Revelation Its Grand Climax At Hand!*, page 152.

There simply is no end to the way the Bible can be molded to fit a particular worldview. The Society is not alone in this but they demonstrate a remarkable skill in this regard. They continue to hold to the 1914 generation time frame within which all of the prophecies of the Apocalypse must be fulfilled. They seem unwilling to admit that they have already run out of time in this regard. They continue to forecast the destruction of "Babylon the Great" by the nations led by the United Nations. (page 258) This, too, must come within the "generation".

In reading the various commentaries on the book of Revelation it becomes apparent that a wide range of interpretations are made possible. For my own part, I view the book as relevant for all generations of Christians and not just a few thousand at the end of the age. The Apocalypse helps us to further appreciate God's majesty and power. The certain success of all his grand promises for the Church of Jesus Christ are assured and set forth in symbolic beauty. The end of all enemies to truth and righteousness are seen to fall in humiliating dishonor and defeat. This is the ultimate message of this book and this is what I think we should look for in the reading of it. If it enriches our hope, faith and love then it serves a worthwhile service to the struggling members of the body of Christ. □

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## **Another Look at 1 Corinthians 5:9-13**

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A primary text often used by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society to destroy family ties in connection with a disfellowshipping is 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 which reads: "In my letter 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. Other-wise, you would actually have to get out of the world. But now I am writing you 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. For what do I have to do with those outside? Do you not judge those inside, while God judges those out-side? 'Remove the wicked [man] from among your-selves.'" - *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation*

This text is appealed to by the Society as the scrip-

tural injunction to cut off all family ties with one who either is disfellowshipped or disassociates himself. The eating of a meal together is probably one of the most common and basic evidences of a civilized relationship. It does not necessarily indicate a close or friendly relationship. Businessmen may eat together only as an act of courtesy or good will. So to forbid even the eating of a meal with someone demonstrates how complete the avoidance of that person should be. We cannot ignore what the apostle Paul had to say in this regard. There may arise a situation wherein we might have to follow this counsel ourselves. But we would want to be sure that we did so appropriately. I believe that the Watchtower Society uses this text inappropriately and destructively.

As with any portion of Scripture we need to get the setting and understand the context. Only in this way can

we begin to approach an understanding of what is being said. What was the situation that Paul was addressing when he wrote as he did? Paul had heard through reliable sources that a member in good standing in the Corinthian assembly was living in an incestuous relationship with his father's wife. Paul was distressed that the congregation had failed to repudiate such conduct and that some among them seemed to condone it. (1 Cor.5: 1-8) We do not have the complete story but we have enough to understand what Paul was saying. The fornicator in question was a "brother" in the faith and in good standing with the congregation. He was on the "inside" not the "outside". (vss.1,12) He was *a spiritually corrupting element within the association* that threatened to ferment the whole body of believers. The apostle appeals to the congregation to cleanse itself of this leaven: "Your [cause for] boasting is not fine. Do you not know that a little leaven ferments the whole lump? Clear away the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, according as you are free from ferment. For, indeed, Christ our Passover has been sacrificed ... 'Remove the wicked [man] from among yourselves.'" - 1 Cor. 5: 6,7, 13 *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation*

It becomes clear, then, that Paul was speaking about association with someone within the congregation-one recognized as a spiritual brother-who was practicing immorality. It was his being recognized as an insider that made associating with him so dangerous. Paul makes it clear that being in contact with an outsider guilty of immoral conduct did not present a threat to the congregation. To avoid all such contact in the world at large would necessitate getting "out of the world" altogether. This portion of Scripture, then, is not discussing how a disfellow-shipped person ought to be treated. It is discussing how a brother within the congregation was to be viewed and treated should he become guilty of this sort of conduct. Failure to remove such a contam-inating influence endangered the whole assembly. Such a person-within the congregation-ought to be avoided. One should not even dine with such a brother to let him know how his conduct was viewed and to avoid sharing in his dishonor.

But what is the situation after one is expelled from the brotherhood? Is he still considered a "brother" any longer? Does he view himself as still a fellow associate (brother) and part of the very congregation that expelled him? The only reasonable answer to both questions is No. In the fellowship of Jehovah's Witnesses the term "brother" is restricted to those within the organization. A Witness would never call a non-Witness "brother" or "sister" who claimed to be a Christian but

was outside the organization. Witnesses come into daily contact with Christians outside of their affiliation. They often work with such people, have meals with them on occasion but in no way feel con-taminated by this "mixing in company" with them. Why? Because all such persons are viewed by them as outsiders-not insiders! When one is disfellowshipped or disassociated he or she becomes an outsider. The tie of brotherhood was broken when the person was dis-fellowshipped or voluntarily disassociated.

Interestingly, the Watch Tower Society applies this logic to the very next thing the apostle writes about in I Corinthians. After discussing the matter of how someone guilty of some God-dishonoring practice ought to be viewed and treated he next addresses the matter of going to court against a brother. Again, Paul finds fault with the way the Corinthian brothers were doing things. He chastises them for not settling dis-putes among themselves and turning to outsiders for legal resolutions: "I am speaking to move you to shame. Is it true that there is not one wise man among you that will be able to judge between his brothers, but brother goes to court with brother, and that before unbelievers?"-1 Corinthians 6: 5,6 *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation*

It happens from time to time, today, that one Jehovah's Witness is defrauded by another Jehovah's Witness and needs legal help to recover damages. The above statement by Paul has raised the issue of the propriety of such an action and the Society has had to make a judgment in the matter. Their counsel runs parallel to what we read in the chapter regarding the need for Christian brothers to have the love and wisdom to settle matters among themselves and not have to turn to the outside (the world) for help. In discussing the impropriety of one brother taking another brother to court in a hostile situation they set forth the proposition that where serious sinning has taken place and the person is unrepentant and unwilling to take counsel from the representatives of the congregation then the situation is different:

"But suppose the case has been brought before the representatives of the congregation and one of the disputants has been definitely proved in the wrong, shown guilty of working an injurious fraud against a brother, and yet this guilty one will not accept the decision of the congregation and will not repay the amount taken? When the evidence is clear and convincing the congregation cannot ignore it, but must disfellowship the one who is a thief. In this connection Paul said a thief,

among other offenders, would not inherit God's kingdom; neither does he have any right to be in the Christian congregation on earth. (I Cor.6:9,10) So when the evidence is conclusive and the offender shows no repentance and no inclination to repay, he should be disfellowshipped. "

"Now the disfellowshipped thief is on the outside of the congregation. He is no longer a brother. He is no longer involved in Paul's instructions at 1 Corinthians 6: 1-6. For the wronged one still within the congregation to now take the defrauder to court would be no violation of Paul's counsel, for it would not now be a case of brother going to court against brother, which is what Paul was forbidding." -*The Watchtower*, February 15,1955, pages 126,127.

This policy and the reasoning behind it is still in force among Jehovah's Witnesses. A disfellowshipped person is no longer viewed as a brother and therefore not "involved in Paul's instructions at 1 Corinthians 6:1-6", according to the Watch Tower Society. Would not the same reasoning apply to what is said at 1 Corinthians 5: 1-6 regarding the instructions Paul gives in regard to a brother practicing sin? Once disfellowshipped such a person would no longer be "involved" in what is said about not even eating with him. From the standpoint of the apostle there are but two places for us to be—either inside or outside of the congregation. Once a brother is expelled from the congregation he is on the outside and ought to be treated like any other person on the outside. Showing human kindness to such a person would in no way endanger the congregation or the person showing the human kindness. Extending common courtesy to such a one could not reasonably be interpreted as condoning the sin for which he was disfellowshipped.

Jesus outlined the steps that ought to be taken in the event a brother is overtaken in serious wrongdoing and how unrepentant ones should be viewed: "Moreover, if your brother commits a sin, go lay bare his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two more, in order that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. If he does not listen to them, speak to the congregation. If he does not listen even to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as tax collector." -Matthew 18:15-17 *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation*.

Jesus seems to be saying that a person unwilling to

mend his ways even after being confronted by the entire congregation ought to be viewed as an outsider: "as a man of the nations and as a tax collector." In saying this was he suggesting that such a one be shunned to the extent that Jehovah's Witnesses teach? The Watch Tower Society would have you think so. They discussed this text in the September 15, 1981 issue of *The Watchtower*. In this issue they acknowledge that Jesus did have some contact and dealings with people of the nations and tax collectors whom he treated with "expressions of merciful kindness." (page 18, par. 14) However, they say this was only in cases where such persons came to him seeking help and would not apply to "unrepentant sinners" :

"However, Jesus' effort to give a witness to tax collectors who drew near to him' and 'followed him' was not a pattern of how unrepentant sinners were to be treated. (Mark 2:15; Luke 15:1) How can we be sure? Though Christ ate with such collectors, *the apostle Paul ordered that Christians must 'not even eat with' the sinner who was expelled from the congregation.* (1 Cor 5:11) Also, Jesus told his disciples to deal with an unrepentant wrongdoer as, logically, they viewed tax collectors of the time. The translation by R. F. Weymouth reads: 'Regard him just as you regard a Gentile or a tax -collector. ,,, - *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1981, page 19 (italics added) .

The magazine argues that the way Jesus' disciples would view a Gentile or tax collector was ["logically"] the same way Jews in general would view such ones. They quote from *M'Clintock and Strong's Cyclopedia* which says: "The publicans [tax collectors] of the New Test[ament] were regarded as traitors and apostates, defiled by their frequent intercourse with the heathen, willing tools of the oppressor. They were classed with sinners ... with harlots ... with the heathen ... Left to themselves, men of decent lives holding aloof from them, their only friends or companions were found among those who, . like themselves, were outcasts."- Vol. VIII, page 769.

In refuting what the magazine says in this regard it needs to be pointed out that Paul did *not order that those expelled from the congregation were not to be eaten with*. His order had to do with *anyone within the congregation as a brother who practiced serious sin*. As long as the person guilty of serious sin was still viewed as a brother he should be shunned in order to avoid congregational contamination. And while it may be true that Jesus' disciples may have harbored views like those of Jews in general regarding Gentiles and tax

collectors Jesus' teaching and life disabused such an attitude. Jesus violated the national taboos by eating with sinners and tax collectors and ministering to Samaritans and Gentiles. Consider what Jesus had to say about harsh attitudes towards such ones in the Sermon on the Mount and the story of The Good Samaritan. (Matt. chapters 5-7; Luke chapter 10)

As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called upon to repudiate wrongdoing. A Christian congregation needs to expel those who willfully practice sins that God condemns. In effect such an expelled one has gone back to the things once left behind. He or she is now viewed as an outsider in relation to the faith. But would it be wrong to pray for such a person that they come to repentance? Would it be wrong to speak with them and even urge them to reevaluate matters? If a family member, would it be wrong to treat them with human kindness and continue to have at least some association with them in family gatherings and associations? Would it be wrong to extend common courtesy to them? I see nothing in the spirit of Jesus Christ to suggest such a thing.

The greatest harm, by far, that is caused by the Society's legalistic view of matters is what it does to families. It literally destroys them. They like to say that when a person is disfellowshipped only the spiritual ties are broken in families-not human ties. Regarding this they write: "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." -*The Watchtower*, September 15, 1981, page 28. [Note that only spiritual ties are broken; family ties are said to remain intact.]

So, in principle, the Society acknowledges that family ties are not broken by a disfellowshipping action. If a husband is disfellowshipped and his wife remains a loyal Witness she can continue as before in the "one flesh" relationship without fear of contamination or congregational disapproval. The same is true of a child who might be disfellowshipped and whose parents are Witnesses. He is still their son or daughter and deserving of all the rights and privileges that go with relationship. Aging parents may be brought into the home or remain in the home despite their being in the disfellowshipped condition if there is a need. The Society speaks of meeting certain needs such as training, discipline,

education, and financial support within the family circle by loyal Witnesses toward disfellowshipped ones. All of these things can be done, they say, because family ties have not been broken. In Pharisee fashion, however, they set forth rules for those living outside of the home that fall far short of what it means to retain family ties. Concerning this they say:

"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. None-theless, 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. ...' - *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1981, page 29 (italics in original). You'll note they misapply Paul's instructions again here.

With this kind of reasoning geographical location determines how people are to be treated! And, having already given their interpretation of what Paul is talking about at 1 Corinthians 5: 11, they again use it to give a scriptural face to their arbitrary ruling. It matters not at all to the Society that many disfellowshipped or disassociated people have not been practicing any of the sins Paul discusses. Many have been expelled over issues involving a Bible-trained conscience-not immorality. The above quotation speaks of contact being limited to "necessary family matters" but they do not qualify what that means. What are necessary matters within the family? Apart from physical and financial needs what about emotional needs? To cut a family member off totally is to ignore a fundamental human need. It is a form of abuse-the abuse of neglect. It also is a denial of fundamental human rights. It is a form of psychological persecution. That the Watchtower Society recognizes such fundamental rights is proven by what they had to say in an-

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other issue of their primary journal:

" As to disfellowshipped family members (not minor sons or daughters) living outside the home, each family must decide to what extent they will have association with such ones. This is not something that the congregation elders can decide for them. What the elders are concerned with is that 'leaven' is not reintroduced into the congregation through spiritual fellowshiping with those who had to be removed as such 'leaven.' Thus, if a disfellowshipped parent goes to visit a son or daughter or to see grandchildren and is allowed to enter the Christian home, this is not the concern of the elders. Such a one has a natural right to visit his blood relatives and his offspring. Similarly, when sons or daughters render honor to a parent, though disfellowshipped, by calling to see how such a one is or what needs he or she may have, this act in itself is not a spiritual fellowshiping." -*The Watchtower*, August 1, 1974, page 471.

The above quotation was taken from the article "Maintaining a Balanced Viewpoint Toward Disfellowshipped Ones" and, for the most part, it did present a more balanced view and a more scriptural view. It showed how Christians could fulfill the law of love within the family arrangement without compromising their love of God or threatening the congregation. In another paragraph the same article had this to say about this matter: "A woman whose husband is disfellowshipped is not released from the Scriptural requirement to respect his husbandly headship over her; only death or Scriptural divorce from a husband results in such release. (Rom. 7:1-3; Mark 10:11,12) A husband likewise is not released from loving his wife as 'one flesh' with him even though she should be disfellowshipped. (Matt. 19:5,6; Eph. 5:28-31) Parents similarly remain under the injunction to 'go on bringing up their children in the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah' even though a baptized son or a daughter yet a minor is disfellowshipped. (Eph. 6:4) And sons and daughters, of whatever age, remain under the obligation to 'honor their father and mother' although one or both of these may be dis-fellowshipped. (Matt. 15:4; Eph. 6:2) This is not difficult to understand when we consider that, according to the Scriptures, even political officials of this world are to be shown due honor by Christians. . . -*Ibid*, page 470.

Due to the impact of this article there was a brief moment in the 1974-1980 period when the Witnesses demonstrated a more balanced view towards disfellowshipped ones and allowed themselves to express a

measure of human kindness. I recall my mother telephoning a sister of hers who had been a Witness but had been disfellowshipped for quite a few years. My mother and another sister, my aunt Creta, hadn't spoken to her in all those years but when this article appeared she felt free to express her sisterly concern and affection. They took the initiative, telephoned their sister (my aunt Vera) and spoke with her at length in a most sisterly manner. I was present when my mother and my aunt discussed the propriety of making such a call and the reasoning they expressed clearly reflected what they had read in the August 1, 1974 *Watchtower*. I believe that the affection they felt toward their sister was always there but not until they were, in effect, given permission, by what they read in the *Watchtower* would their consciences allow them to express that affection.

By way of contrast, my mother has not spoken to me in eight years. She did answer a letter I had written her but only to politely tell me that she no longer wanted me to act towards her as a son. I am convinced that the hard line returned to in the above magazine greatly influenced her attitude. By nature my mother is quite sentimental and I am an only child. My father died in December 1980 making her a widow. Despite my offer to do things for her as a son ought to do she has denied me this out of a perceived loyalty towards Jehovah God. I know it pains her greatly but she would never treat me as a son again as she would view this as compromising herself. Of course, if *The Watchtower* published an article that returned to the more scripturally and humanely balanced position represented in the 1974 *Watchtower*, I have no doubt that she would moderate her hard attitude. However, she would be offended if anyone suggested she was simply following the directions of men.

Repeatedly, in the 1981 *Watchtower*, 1 Corinthians 5: 11-13 is appealed to as the basis for having no social intercourse with disfellowshipped or disassociated persons-not even eating with such ones! Yet, despite their legalism in the matter they are not consistent in the application of their own interpretation. For example, they discuss the situation when a married couple are both Jehovah's Witnesses and one of them is disfellowshipped or disassociated, In this situation, they say, the marriage covenant remains the same. A wife, if her husband was disfellowshipped, is still 'one flesh' with her husband and is obliged to love and respect him. This means that they would share the same table and bed. (*WT* 9/15/81, p.27, par.9) The same would hold true with minor children living at home who might

be expelled from the congregation. They would continue to receive their due as children which would include eating with the family along with caring for "his physical needs and provide moral training and discipline", according to *The Watchtower*. (*Ibid.* p.28, par. 8) They even allow that a disfellowshipped child living outside the home might be allowed to return under certain circumstances. (*Ibid.* p.29, par. 16) Yet, they say the situation is entirely different with those separated ones who are not immediate family members and are living outside the 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 house 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'" -(*Ibid.* p.29, par.18) [Note: the word "anyone" is italicized in the original]

If, as the Watchtower Society insists, the above text means that " *anyone*" disfellowshipped or disassociated is not to be eaten with how is it that married people and children are excepted? If such ones are not fit to mix in company with how is it that marriage mates can go on living a normal relationship where an excommunication has taken place? Paul doesn't make any exceptions in the way he applies his counsel. On what grounds does the Society? The Society makes certain exceptions because it chooses to and the Witnesses accept this without question. If the Society changed its ruling the Witnesses would change immediately-again without question.

However, as stated at the beginning of this presentation, I believe that 1 Corinthians 5: 11-13 is misapplied by the organization. Paul seems to be addressing situations where a brother [someone *within* the congregation - not an excommunicated person *outside* the congregation] is practicing a condemnable sin but still wanting to remain a "brother" in good standing *within* the congregation. It appears that some Christians in the congregation at Corinth agreed with this person in this regard. They were no doubt among the minority of brothers who did not later share in condemning his practice of immorality. (2 Cor. 2:6) Of course, the Watchtower Society has taken considerable liberty with the text in question by applying its application to showing disrespect for them or questioning them or expressing doubts about anything they say as equal to

the serious sins Paul mentions. Be that as it may, once a person is expelled by the Witnesses he/she is no longer viewed as a spiritual brother. So whatever counsel given as to how a "brother" ought to be viewed and treated would no longer be valid toward one now outside the congregation.

As pointed out previously, this is exactly the way the Society gets around the matter of not taking a brother to court. They argue that the restriction ceases to apply once the "brother" is put out of the congregation because he is no longer a "brother" and can be viewed and treated like anyone else that is outside of the organization. So whatever Paul has to say about the wrongness of taking a brother to a civil court is circumvented. (1 Cor. 6: 1-7) If the Society was consistent with their interpretations they would have to argue that you should not take a disfellowshipped person to court. That they do not do so suggests something of an arbitrary approach to the Scriptures.

No genuine disciple of Jesus Christ approves of immoral living. In certain extreme situations there may be a need for a group of believers to expel someone from their community worship in order to demonstrate their loyalty to Christ and to preserve the spirit in their midst. That was the situation in Corinth. But once a person is outside and no longer a threat to the spirituality of the assembly the matter ends there. Of course, individual conscience would determine what contact brothers would have with that person afterward. Surely, they would pray that he might repent and be restored. They could still urge him to reevaluate matters and reprove him in the spirit of Christ. Nothing would be gained by failing to be courteous to this person. There is not the slightest suggestion in the Bible that such a person should be treated any differently than any other non-brother. It would seem that any Christian would be able to clearly differentiate between spiritual and human ties. Such ones do not need a human agency to dictate to them what is and what is not appropriate. That the leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses is more concerned about protecting themselves than upholding Bible principle is quite clear. However, individual Witnesses must take responsibility for their actions in these matters. If they follow the directives of men who set aside biblical responsibilities in order to maintain a sealed society they will answer to the Lord they claim to serve. □