

THE UNCHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF SHUNNING

Shunning is practiced by the Amish, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Closed Brethren, the Mennonites, and the Church of Scientology. It is also practised by some minor cults. Of these denominations the Jehovah's Witnesses operate one of the most extreme sets of rules in regard to the shunning of family members, minors and those who are baptised without understanding all of the possible future repercussions. Shunning is actually a display of fear on the part of the one doing the shunning, rather than a display of the biblical teaching of love. In the Scriptures the term *shun* appears on only two occasions where, in both cases, it refers to the avoiding of a false teaching. The governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses has changed its mind several times on the issue of who is or is not to be shunned.

“QUIT MIXING IN COMPANY WITH” DOES NOT MEAN TOTALLY CUTTING SOMEONE OFF

THOSE WHO ARE TOO LAZY TO WORK

❖ *The apostle Paul wrote that: “...we are giving you orders...to **withdraw from every brother walking disorderly** and not according to the tradition you received from us (the apostles) ... if anyone does *not want to work*, neither let him eat ... if anyone is not obedient to our (the apostles) word...keep this one *marked*, **stop associating (quit mixing in company) with** (Gk *sunanamignusthai* = *mingle with*) him, that he may become ashamed. And yet do not be considering him as an enemy, but **continue admonishing him as a brother**” (2 Thess. 3:6-15).*

A “*brother walking disorderly*” does not refer to someone who disagrees with the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, but rather it refers to one who is capable of working but will not work and who is a burden on the brothers. However, contrary to the teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses, such a person is not to be shunned - **but admonished**. As will be seen later the associating that must cease refers to denying him access to the meetings until he changes his ways.

NOTE: There is clearly no distinction between one who is “*marked*” and one with whom one must “*stop associating.*”

THOSE WHO ARE DISFELLOWSHIPED

As noted in STUDY 16 those guilty of the following characteristics would be disfellowshipped and denied fellowship at the meeting, and Christians are admonished to:

❖ “...quit mixing in company with fornicators, *not meaning entirely* with the fornicators of this world or the greedy persons and extortioners or idolaters ... But...**quit mixing in company with (same Greek word as in 2 Thess. 3:14, 15)** anyone who is called a brother that is a fornicator, greedy person, idolater, reviler, drunkard or an extortioner, **not even eating with such a man** (*a reference to the Lord's supper*)... **Remove** the wicked [man] from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Because 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 links together the phrases “*quit mixing in company with*” and “*remove the wicked [man] from among yourselves,*” such a lazy brother, as is mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 3, must also be removed from among Christians so that he would be excluded from Christian meetings. However, such “**withdraw from**” and “**stop associating (quit mixing in company with) with**” cannot mean shunning because one must “**continue admonishing him as a brother**” even though he was considered to be “*worse than a man without faith*” (1 Timothy 5:8). The phrase “*called a brother*” implies a “*so-called brother*” as rendered in many translations and meaning that although he is recognized as a brother he is not acting as one. To “*remove the wicked [man] from among yourselves*” refers to **excluding such a person from the house where the Christian meeting takes place** because

that is where the love feast and the “*breaking of bread*” (i.e. “*the eating*”) occurred. However, these texts do not prohibit normal conversation with an unrepentant wrongdoer “*called a brother*” that is a fornicator etc. James 5:19 and Galatians 6:1 positively encourage witnessing to them. The shunning of these ones would be spiritual abuse.

SHUNNING DEFEATS THE PURPOSE OF DISFELLOWSHIPPING

Apart from the fact that Christians must take care not to follow the same wrong path as the lazy Christian, but rather to “*continue admonishing him as a brother*” he/she should reprove him or any other sinner with the goal of turning him back to God’s way:

- ❖ “Quit sharing with them in the unfruitful works...even **be reproving them**” (*Eph. 5:11*).
- ❖ “If anyone among you is misled from the truth and another turns him back, know that he who **turns a sinner back** from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (*James 5:19, 20*).

This text in James refers to someone who is being misled away from the clear scriptural teachings of or about Jesus. It is not referring to someone who has some difference with us in his interpretation of the Scriptures.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL

- ❖ “Brothers if indeed a man is overtaken in some transgression, you **the spiritual ones** restore such a man in a spirit of meekness.” (*Gal. 6:1 UBS Interlinear also KIT*).

This responsibility was not given exclusively to elders but is the personal responsibility of all in the congregation who are *spiritual*. However, the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses uses Galatians 6:1 in an attempt to prove that the elders, as the only ones who are ‘spiritually qualified’, should deal with an erring Christian. In this text the NWT spuriously adds the word ‘qualified’ which is not in or implied by the Greek. All literal translations say: “*You who are spiritual*” and not “*You who are spiritually qualified*.” The REB renders it: “*You...who live by the spirit*.” All Christians should be attempting to ‘live by the spirit’ i.e. to be *spiritual*. Furthermore, none of Paul’s letters were addressed specifically to elders. Only in the letter to the Philippians are the overseers and ministerial servants included in an address which is to all the holy ones. Specifically Galatians 6:1 is addressed “*to the brothers and sisters*.” (Please see NRSV, NLT and the footnote to the ESV). Hence it applies to all, both men and women who are spiritual, as ones to give assistance to an erring one.

EXCLUSION FROM CHRISTIAN MEETINGS

1. “**NOT RECEIVE HIM INTO [YOUR] HOUSE**”

- ❖ *The apostle John prophesied that there would be:* “ many deceivers ... persons **not confessing Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**. This is the deceiver and the **antichrist**. Everyone that pushes ahead and does *not remain in the teaching of the Christ* does not have God. If **anyone** comes to you and does not bring this teaching, **never receive him into your homes** (“*house*”) or **say a greeting** (Gk. *khairo*) **to him**. For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works”
(2 John 7, 9-11).

The fear in the late 1st century was the *teaching of the Gnostics* who would *not have been welcomed into the house used for Christian meetings*. (Please see STUDY 16 DISFELLOWSHIPPING). This letter was written to a single local congregation under the figurative phrase ‘*the chosen lady*’ who would have held their meetings in the ‘*house*’ where they were not to receive the false teacher. The Greek word here used for *house* is singular and therefore should not be translated as “*homes*.” No other translation says ‘*homes*’.

The New International Bible Commentary says of verse 10:

- a. ...**into your house** on our interpretation of 'the elect lady' will mean into *church_fellowship*...the **welcome** will signify *church approval* or commendation.

2 John 7, 9-11 refers to **any false-teacher who does not bring this [the apostles and therefore Jesus'] teaching of the Christ**. And so the NIV study notes say:

The instruction does not prohibit greeting or even inviting a person into one's home for conversation. John was warning against providing food and shelter (for such travelling false teachers) since this would be an investment in his *wicked work*.

2. "NOT SAYING A GREETING TO HIM"

khairo = be rejoicing (KIT). It was a warm eastern greeting and not a simple *hello, good day* (as in the NWT) or daily conversation.

aspazomai = to greet; to welcome; to engage in hospitable recognition; to spend time in warm exchange. Bauer's Gk/Eng. lexicon.

These two Greek words are used interchangeably at Luke 1:28, 29 in modern translations. The NJB and KIT render them as "rejoice" and "greeting." Therefore, to tell believers that they mustn't say *hello* to or engage in conversation with "...persons **not confessing Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**," is a misapplication of this verse. However, Christians would not address the person in a way that **would imply approval or agreement** with the false teacher. Most of the world does "*not remain in the teaching of the Christ*," but this does not mean one must never talk to, greet or accept an invitation for a meal (1 Cor.10:27) with those who do not have exactly the same Christian beliefs as us. Neither does simply conversing with an ex-member mean that one agrees with his viewpoint. If a Christian seeks to understand more accurately "**the teaching of the Christ**" (*not that of a particular group*) that would be a reason to have discussions on the subject. However, these verses apply to one who tries to introduce teachings from pagan Greek Gnostic or Judaising sources. Even so, true Christians would not use a threat — a "*fleshly weapon*" (2 Cor.10:4) — when challenged or questioned about Bible truth.

3. "NOT EATING THE MEAL WITH" and "NOT MIXING IN COMPANY WITH"

The phrase in 1 Corinthians 5:11 of "**not even eating with such a man**" applies to the **weekly love feasts** and **Lord's evening meal** at the meetings. The key concern is the damage done to the honour of Jesus Christ if such a wicked man were viewed as representative of the standards of Jesus. This has no bearing on a Christian's eating a meal with someone who becomes one treated as "*a man of the nations*" because:

- ❖ "If anyone of **the unbelievers** invites you and you wish to go, proceed to eat everything that is set before you..." (1Cor. 10:27).

This indicates that there is no condemnation of a Christian for socializing with an unbeliever, and the same would apply to someone who is now treated as "*a man of the nations*." However, outside of this, *conversation with him was encouraged so that he may be saved*. The exclusion of the disfellowshipped person with the phrases from 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 7 and 1 Corinthians 5:11, namely, "**keep this one marked, withdraw from, quit mixing in company with**" refers to exclusion from fellowship (Gk. *koinonia*) i.e. exclusion from the Christian meeting and especially from the time in feasting together.

MISAPPLICATION OF SHUNNING

SHUNNING THE PROVEN FALSE TEACHING— NOT THE PERSON

The text at Romans 16 applies to those within the Christian congregation who were the Judaizers in the 1st century. When they were involved in the discussions recorded in Acts 15 their teaching was *not shunned*. However, at a later date Paul wrote to the Galatians to prove that keeping any part of the Mosaic Law did not apply to Christians. Later still he wrote to the Romans and then to Titus and later again to Timothy directing them to shun the teaching of such Judaizers. They were not to be listened to as Christian teachers. Therefore Romans 16 does not apply to ex-members who have ceased association, but rather Paul states:

- ❖ “Now I exhort you brothers, to **keep your eye on** those who *cause divisions* and occasions for stumbling contrary to the teaching that you have learned, and **avoid** them. For men of that sort are not slaves of our Lord Christ, but of their own bellies; and *by smooth talk* and complimentary speech they seduce the hearts of guileless ones.” (Rom. 16:17, 18).

Additionally Barnes’ Notes on the N.T explain: “...that is **avoid them (Judaizers) as teachers**. It does not mean they were to be treated harshly; but that they were to be avoided in their instructions.” Similarly, Jesus had earlier warned the disciples to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees so:

- ❖ “then they grasped that he said to watch out, not for the leaven of the loaves, but for **the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees**” (Matt. 16:12).
Yet Jesus did not shun Pharisees but rather he warned against their false teaching.

SHUNNING PROFANE/IRREVERENT CONTROVERSIES

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* the word “shun” means “to persistently avoid.” However, there are only two occasions in the Christian Scriptures when the NWT uses the word “shun” as their rendering of the Greek word *periistazo*. On neither of these occasions does it refer to the shunning of a person but only to the shunning of irreverent babble:

- ❖ “But **shun** (Gk. *periistazo* = *avoid*) **empty speeches** that violate what is holy (“profane empty voicings” KIT); for they will advance to more and more ungodliness” (2 Tim. 2:16).
This relates to the denial of the faith by Hymenaeus and Philetus. It is such “profane empty” talk that is to be avoided.
- ❖ “But **shun** (Gk. *periistazo*) **foolish questionings** (‘controversies’ UBS and most translations) and genealogies and strife and fights over the Law” (Titus. 3:9).
This relates to the Judaizers in the congregation. It is their proven false teaching that is to be avoided. This was just as with Jesus’ rejection of the “leaven of the Pharisees.”

DON’T SHUN PEOPLE

However, the passages relating to people in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 and 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 contain the Greek word *sunanamignumi* rendered in the NWT as “stop associating with” and “quit mixing in company.” This means that one should **not “mingle with”** that person according to Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon; whereas *periistemi* is somewhat stronger and indicating that the Christian should walk away, but relates only to the times when someone is **voicing profane things**, and so would not be continuous and so would not be a reason to totally cut off such a person. This clearly does not include the person who has a genuine difference of understanding of the details of certain subjects. To cut such a person off would simply be evidence of a cult-mindset in operation. So the passages in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 and 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 are not advocating that a Christian should shun or persistently avoid or cut someone off, but rather to not “mingle with” such a person who is being **profane and purposely controversial**, but certainly to “**continue admonishing him as a brother**” (2 Thess. 3:15).

REJECTING HIM AS A DIVISIVE TEACHER – NOT AS A PERSON

- ❖ “As for a man that **promotes a sect**, **reject him** after a first and a second admonition; knowing that such a man has been turned out of the way and is sinning, he being self-condemned” (*Titus 3:10*).

Again, as in Romans 16:17, 18 and Matthew 16:12, this is rejection of him as a Christian teacher **and a rejecting of him from one’s fellowship at meetings**. This text does not refer to someone who has only a difference of understanding, but to “*a person who stirs up division*” ESV, “*divisive person*” NIV, “*factious man*” NASU, REB. The context shows that such a man was a Judaiser “*fighting over the Law*,” trying to cause division in the 1st century true body of Christ. *Barnes notes* tell us that: “This man is a heretic, **not one who merely holds a different doctrine** from that which is regarded as orthodoxy.”

Intensive study of the Scriptures and their background reveals that the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses has, indeed, promoted a sect with over 30 significant teachings that can be shown as not matching the data in the Scriptures. This has occurred because of their failure to listen to others with specialist knowledge. However, the promoting of a sect also involves the placing of particular doctrinal interpretations above the love, mercy and forgiveness that promote true Christianity (Matt.23:23). Indeed, there are healthy benefits in having different opinions:

- ❖ “For there **must also be sects among you**, that the persons approved may also become manifest among you” (*1 Cor. 11:19 NWT*).

The NJB renders “*sects*” as: “**differing groups.**” And the NIV renders it: “No doubt there have to be **differences** among you.” The literal translations render the Greek word as “*factions*” instead of “*sects*” (NASU, ESV, NAB, NKJV, and NRSV). Of course, **Christian sects today**, most of which claim to represent the Truth, need to be careful in applying Titus 3:10 to those who disagree with them. When Jesus returns he may judge them as those “*performing many powerful works in [his] name*” with the words “*I never knew you! Get away from me you workers of lawlessness*” (Matt. 7:22-23). *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* shows that “*apostasy*” does not concern differences of interpretation, but defines it as: “the determined **wilful rejection of Christ and His teachings** by a Christian believer.” Evidently this is different from false belief in genuine error, which is the result of ignorance.

“NOT A DECEIVER OR AN ANTICHRIST”

- ❖ “...persons **not confessing Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Everyone that pushes ahead and does *not remain in the teaching of the Christ...*”
(*2 John 7, 9*).

Because a person seeks clarification of “**the teaching of the Christ**” (not that of a particular group) and he comes to a different understanding of the Scriptures to that of the denomination, he is clearly not “*one that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ.*” Such a person should not be falsely labelled “*deceiver and the antichrist.*” But his honest attitude of searching for truth would be a reason to listen to him and have reasonable discussions on the subject. In the earliest years of the WT magazine Charles Taze Russell viewed the making of all followers think alike on doctrine as the original cause of the Great Apostasy.

THOSE NO LONGER ASSOCIATED

Many who disagree with the teachings of any particular denomination may indeed be being fully compliant with the words of Jesus and the apostles. It would indeed be unchristian to treat these ones as if they were fornicators, greedy persons, idolaters, revilers, drunkards or extortioners or as antichristian—all things which they are, in fact, not. There should be no **name-calling** such as the misuse of the word *apostate*. If however, the individual makes it clear that he has permanently left any and all Christian association and has returned to *the world*, he would be treated as “*a man of the*

nations” i.e. as not a Christian. This is the practice of some of the Mennonites. So if he had committed sins, according to the scriptural definition of such, there would be normal constructive discussion of the Scriptures to persuade him toward living a Christian life.

JESUS PURPOSELY SPENT TIME WITH THOSE WHO WERE SHUNNED

The Sadducees, Pharisees (Heb. *Perushim* – the Separated Ones) and Essenes were concerned about purity to an extreme and so they considered the tax-collectors, the prostitutes, the lame, the lepers, and sinners as ones to be avoided i.e. they shunned them. Jesus, however, operated his life according to “*the Law of Love*” and sought out these tax-collectors and other sinners, eating with them in table fellowship (Mark 2:15) and endeavouring to help them. He further broke the purity rules by physically touching lepers (Mark 1:40-41) and was unconcerned when the haemorrhaging woman touched him (Mark 5:25-29). Jesus clearly **valued life above the over concern about purity laws** which resulted in the shunning of outcasts.

Evidently the tax-collectors, prostitutes and other sinners only repented after Jesus had spent time with them. So Jesus **went out of his way to be in contact with these shunned ones**. And so, when the Pharisees asked the disciples:

❖ “Why is it that your teacher **eats with** tax-collectors and sinners?” *Jesus replied that* “Persons in health do not need a physician but the ailing do ... For I came to call, not righteous people, but sinners” (*Matt. 9:11, 13*).

Jesus did not mean that these Pharisees were in good spiritual health, but only that they *mistakenly thought* they were in such a fine righteous condition. The shunning policy applied by Jehovah’s Witnesses also leads its members into mistakenly thinking they too are in a fine righteous condition when in fact they are sinners just as much as those they decide to shun:

❖ “Let the one of you that is sinless be the first to throw a stone at her [*the woman caught in adultery*]” (*John 8:7*).

Even regarding genuine enemies his counsel to his followers was to, “Continue to **love** your enemies and to **pray for** those persecuting YOU” (*Matt. 5:44, 45*).

ILLUSTRATIONS AGAINST SHUNNING

Jesus’ attitude regarding the shunning of sinners is further demonstrated in his illustrations:

❖ “...one hundred sheep and one of them gets strayed, will he not leave the ninety nine upon the mountains and **set out on a search** for the one that is **straying**” (*Matt. 18:12*).

❖ ““Do you want us, then to go out and collect them [*the weeds*]?” He said ‘No, that by no chance, while collecting the weeds, you **uproot the wheat with them**. Let both grow together until the harvest”” (*Matt. 13:28-30*). (i.e. “the end of the age” verse 39).

JESUS DID NOT SHUN KNOWN APOSTATES

1. Furthermore, **Judas** was not shunned *by Jesus* at any time even though he knew the wickedness that was in his heart.
2. **The apostate religious leaders** were not shunned by Jesus at any time even though he knew the wickedness that was in their hearts.
3. **Satan**, the ultimate apostate, was not shunned *by Jesus*, but rather he engaged with him in conversation in the wilderness.

JEHOVAH DID NOT SHUN KNOWN APOSTATES

- **Satan** was not shunned *by Jehovah* but rather He engaged with him in conversation concerning Job.
- **The apostate nation of Israel** was sent prophets *by Jehovah*. He did not shun that nation. In contrast to shunning Jesus said “*Happy are the peacemakers*” (Matt. 5:9).

TRUE CHRISTIANS ARE NOT JUDGMENTAL

God does not approve of one’s being judgmental because each Christian individually stands before God for judgment. So, if anyone judges his brother so as to reject him, as did Diotrophes, that one will be judged by God on the same basis.

- ❖ “Diotrophes...those who are wanting to receive them [*the brothers*] he tries to **throw out of the congregation**” (3 John 10).
- ❖ “Who are you to judge the house servant of another? **To his own master** he stands or falls. Indeed he will be made to stand, for Jehovah can make him stand” (Rom. 14:4).
- ❖ “...for with what judgment you are judging, **you will be judged** (Gk *krino*); and with the measure that you are measuring out, **they will measure out to you**” (Matt. 7:2).
Krino = “call into question” as well as “condemn.” Hence Christians should be very tolerant of one another to allow for growth.

TRUE CHRISTIANS ARE NOT SELF-RIGHTEOUS

- ❖ “...those who are walking in a way that is not good ... those who are saying, “keep close to yourself. **Do not approach me**, for I shall certainly convey holiness to you.’ These are smoke in my nostrils...” or “For my holiness will infect you” (Isa. 65:2, 5 REB).

ESV renders it as

“...who say, ‘keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.’ These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day.”

SHUNNING IS SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Shunning, as a policy of a religious group, is a characteristic of a destructive religion. It is one of the most damaging forms of emotional and psychological abuse that is used by some religious groups. It may be likened to rape inasmuch as it needs a victim with whom to play its mind games. If the target victim does not play according to the rules and does not allow the abuse then the abuser cannot reinforce this abusive behaviour and the abuser loses his illusion of power. Shunning is also like a drug inasmuch as the long term continuation of the abuse becomes addictive because the illusion of power over any victim is reinforced. It is therefore highly **dangerous to the abuser** and leads to the hardening of his conscience, making him capable of other forms of abuse.

THE REINSTATEMENT PROCEDURE USED BY JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES IS ABUSIVE

This procedure is to make a repentant disfellowshipped person wait for many months or even years before he/she can return to the meetings; after which, at each meeting, he/she must sit at the back of the Kingdom Hall for another very long period with none of the members being allowed to speak to him/her i.e. *shunning them*. This is not Biblical and is not a loving arrangement. It flies in the face of Jesus’ illustration of the **prodigal son** whose *father* welcomed him with open arms and **without interrogating the son** concerning the son’s changing of his ways. This procedure also flies in the face of the *one lost sheep* illustration. The sheep did not even have to come back and find the shepherd, but rather the search by the shepherd was motivated by love for the sheep.

THE INJUSTICE OF AND DECEPTION OF THE GOVERNING BODY POLICY

Although taught that baptism is an outward symbol of a person's dedication to God, the reality is that, the moment a person gets baptized as a Jehovah's Witnesses he/she has committed themselves to rules of the governing body in a binding contract. Yet, at least in the past, prior to the time of baptism such person was given no information concerning the harsh rules and the resulting disfellowshipping for breaking such rules. This meant that they had not been informed of all the terms of the contract. It was simply not explained to them that they would face the awful situation of being cut off from their family if they later engage in any of the **scripturally invalid** reasons for disfellowshipping used by Jehovah's Witnesses e.g. discussing Bible subjects independent of Jehovah's Witnesses' explanations. (please see STUDY 16). The situation is even worse in the case of children. In spite of the fact that the Jehovah's Witnesses speak against infant baptism and in favour of the making of a mature decision for baptism, some who are only ten years of age and one as young as six years of age have been allowed to be baptized. Even the law of the land in most countries does not allow a child who is under 18 years of age to enter any binding contract because they are not viewed as an adult below that age. So six and ten year old children have entered into the JW binding contract with no mature understanding of the repercussions if they should break it by, for instance, questioning and continuing to question any of the teachings Jehovah's Witnesses. Such repercussions often lead to their being cut off by their family. Furthermore, some who are mentally impaired also have been allowed to get baptized and have later been disfellowshipped when they cannot cope with what is required of them by Jehovah's Witnesses. This too has led to their being shunned.

THE PRACTICE OF SHUNNING CAN LEAD TO FURTHER SERIOUS SINNING

- ❖ "...[Jesus] went on to say to them [Pharisees]: 'Adroitly you *set aside the commandment of God* in order to retain your tradition. For example, Moses said, '**Honor your father and your mother,**' and; 'Let him that reviles father and mother end up in death.' But you men say, 'If a man says to his father or mother: "Whatever I have to which you may get benefit from me is corban, (that is a gift dedicated to God,)" - you men **no longer let him do a single thing for his father or mother**, and thus you **make the word of God invalid** by your tradition...'” (Mark 7:9-13).
- ❖ "...smitters of fathers and smitters of mothers, to murderers of male persons” (1 Tim. 1:9 KIT).

Although this text may refer to literal killing of parents some commentators see it as a reference to *the dishonouring of parents* as pointed out in the Expositor's Bible Commentary:

So J.H Bernard writes, "The rendering... 'murderer's of fathers' is, no doubt, legitimate, but it is not the sin of *murder*, but of dishonouring parents, which is here uppermost in the writer's thought, and the wider translation is justified by the usage of the words elsewhere. For this extreme and outrageous violation of the Fifth commandment the punishment of death was provided in the Mosaic Law (Ex. 21:15)" (p 27). The fact that "murderers" immediately follows perhaps lends some support to "smitters of fathers and mothers" as the correct translation here, This is favored by Alford, Fairbairn, Simpson, and others. Volume 11; p. 352.

Even if this text did mean actual murder, the Jehovah's Witness who "cuts off" his/her parent/parents, because of having a different understanding of the Scriptures, is making those parents "dead" to them. This is, therefore, murder in a metaphorical sense. By the application of the Jehovah's Witnesses "cutting off" policy JW's can be led into the unbiblical position of failing to honour and care for their parents. Because Jehovah made humans with a spiritual dimension to their lives the failure of any Jehovah's Witness to communicate at this level with his/her parents makes them guilty of dishonouring their parents and so they "**make the word of God invalid.**" Such dishonouring of parents puts the JW into the position of sinning against God. Such sinning carries a very serious punishment although, of course, Christians are not under the decrees of the Mosaic Law.

JESUS RENDERS HIS JUDGMENT WHEN HE COMES

Those who wilfully reject God's arrangement through Jesus at the time of his coming will be judged as unworthy of "life in the age to come" and then destroyed in "the lake of fire." However, Christians are warned not to make such judgments until that time:

- ❖ "...do **not judge** anything before the due time, **until the Lord comes**, who will both bring the secret things of darkness to light and make the counsels of the hearts manifest" (1 Cor. 4:5).
- ❖ "...at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven, as **he brings vengeance** on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the good news about our Lord Jesus" (1 Thess. 1:7, 8).
- ❖ "**The Court** took its seat, and there were **books that were opened**...in the visions...someone like a son of man happened to be coming; and to the Ancient of Days he gained access, and they brought him up close even before that One" (Dan. 7:10, 13).

So the revelation of Jesus is a future event that occurs when he comes and the court takes its seat. Please see STUDY 4. JESUS CANNOT HAVE RETURNED IN 1914.

THE APPROPRIATE ACTION OF CHRISTIANS TOWARD SINNERS

The whole purpose of Christians is to help others to have a right relationship with our heavenly Father and His Son. If that relationship becomes damaged or broken then the Christian's role is to attempt to reconcile the sinner with God:

- ❖ "...first **make peace** with your brother" (Matt. 5:24).
- ❖ "If anyone among you is misled from the truth and another turns him back, know that he who **turns a sinner back** from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19).
- ❖ "Brothers if indeed a man is overtaken in some transgression, you the spiritual ones **restore** such a man in a spirit of meekness" (Gal. 6:1 UBS Interlinear).
- ❖ "...quit sharing with them in the unfruitful **works** belonging to darkness, but, rather, even **be reproving them**" (Eph. 5:11).
- ❖ "...if anyone is not obedient to our word...keep this *one marked, stop associating with him*, that he may become ashamed. And yet do not be considering him as an enemy, but **continue admonishing** him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:14, 15).
- ❖ "And if you **love** those loving you, of what credit is it to you?...And if you do good to those doing good to you, really of what credit is it to you?" (Luke 6:32-36).

THE PRAYERS OF AN EX-MEMBER WHO IS STILL CLAIMS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

The governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses strongly discourages its members from listening to the prayers of those who are not of their denomination. This attitude is also taken with someone who leaves the Jehovah's Witnesses or is disfellowshipped for disagreeing with them. In support of this position the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses presents the following Scriptures:

- ❖ "When he is judged, let him go forth as someone **wicked**; And let his very prayer become a sin" (Ps. 109:7).

However, this prophecy is with reference to **Judas Iscariot** and has no application to one who has left any particular Christian group and yet loves and serves Jehovah and Jesus, especially when the departure has been for the purpose of knowing the truth more fully and accurately. However, if the person turns away from God then the situation changes because:

- ❖ “He that is **turning his ear away from the law** – even his prayer is something detestable”
(*Prov. 28:9*).

Yet, the law of God is not determined by any one group but by the Scriptures and, in particular for Christians, by Jesus and his appointed apostles. Scripturally, therefore, the prayer of any seeker after biblical truth who runs his life according to the Scriptures is acceptable to God. Any organization that forbids the participation in prayer of such a person is usurping God’s position. The problem for those who leave the Jehovah’s Witnesses, although maintaining their good relationship with God and Jesus, is that the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses claims to be God’s only channel because of their claim to uniquely have correct teachings. However, this claim is bogus because those teachings have changed significantly over the organization’s life. (Please see STUDY 19, THE CLAIM TO BE GOD’S ORGANIZATION).

PRAYING WITH AN EX-MEMBER

- ❖ “I say to you: Continue to **love** your enemies and to **pray for** those persecuting you” (*Matt. 5:44*).

If Jesus admonished Christians to pray **for an enemy** how much more so for them to *pray with an ex-member*, even if he has a difference of opinion on the meaning of various scriptural positions.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN’S ATTITUDE TO THEIR BEING WRONGFULLY DISFELLOWSHIPED AND/OR SHUNNED

Shunning is a most unnatural and inhumane thing for someone to do to another person. More significantly, being shunned is a very horrible experience when perpetrated by those who had once been one’s good friends. Even worse is when one is shunned by close family members. However, Jesus encouraged Christians with the reality of such situations and the turning of our natural response to such mistreatment on its head when he said:

- ❖ “Happy are you when people reproach you and persecute you and lyingly say every sort of wicked thing against you for my sake. Rejoice and leap for joy” (*Matt. 5:11, 12*).

Paul followed that guidance so that he was able to retain his human dignity in the face of certain abuses:

- ❖ “Now to me it is a very trivial matter that I should be examined by you or **by a human tribunal**. Even I do not examine myself” (*1 Cor. 4:3*).

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN

- The shunning policy of the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the similar policies of other Christian denominations is unsupportable once the known 1st century background of Christianity is taken into account and that any application of the Mosaic law such as ‘cutting off a wrongdoer’ is seen to be relevant only to ancient Israel and has no place in the Christian arrangement of things.
- Unlike the harsh expulsion from the 1st century Synagogue which often involved ones loss of livelihood, Christians were not to shun, in daily life, those excluded from their meetings.
- Shunning defeats the Christian purpose of disfellowshipping.

- The true Christian aim is to help wrongdoers to put their lives in order so as to come back into fellowship. This cannot be accomplished if the wrongdoer is shunned. Neither can it be accomplished by a once a year visit from an elder. Individually Christians **must** kindly help the disfellowshipped one whilst guarding their own thinking. To damage disfellowshipped ones psychologically by the harshness of shunning is an unchristian practice.
- Shunning is seen to be unscriptural and characteristic of religions that are destructive and with a cult mind set.
- Shunning is an immature way of dealing with differences of viewpoint. It is like the silent treatment one child might give to his/her sibling.
- The dual purpose of the shunning policy of the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses seems to be:
 1. To stop the current membership learning from former members the truths about the actual history of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. This history includes many failed prophetic statements, many unbiblical teachings, lying to and un-Christ-like dealings with its membership, and its double standards.
 2. A tool of emotional blackmail so that former Jehovah's Witnesses whose families are still JWs will be forced to return to the organization. It also acts as a tool for making doubting members afraid to leave for fear of the extreme consequences regarding being cut off from their families.
- Shunning is spiritual abuse and is a sin against God.
 - ❖ "For such freedom Christ set us free. Therefore stand fast, and do not let yourselves be confined **again in a yoke of slavery**" (*Gal. 5:1*).

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RECOMMENDED WEBSITE

<http://www.freeminds.org/psychology/shunning>

